

KÉRABAN THE INFLEXIBLE

(PART I.)

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUIDARA

BY

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EIGHTY DAYS," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

How Van Mitten and his valet walked and talked	PAGE 9
--	-----------

CHAPTER II.

How Scarpante the steward and Captain Yarhud discussed projects with which the reader must become acquainted . .	21
--	----

CHAPTER III.

How Kéraban met Van Mitten, and was greatly surprised at his appearance	30
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

Showing how Seigneur Kéraban, more headstrong than ever, came into collision with the Turkish authorities	39
---	----

CHAPTER V.

How Seigneur Kéraban discussed his journey, and how he quitted Constantinople	47
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

Showing how the travellers encountered some difficulties, chiefly in the delta of the Danube	55
--	----

CHAPTER VII.

In which the horses of the chaise do from fear what they would
not do for the whip

CHAPTER VIII.

In which the reader will be pleased to become acquainted with
the fair Amasia, and her intended husband, Ahmet

CHAPTER IX.

Showing how Captain Yarhud very nearly succeeded in his
enterprise

CHAPTER X.

In which Ahmet, in deference to circumstances, makes an ener-
getic resolution

CHAPTER XI.

In which a somewhat dramatic incident occurs in the fantastic
history of the journey

CHAPTER XII.

In which Van Mitten discourses on tulips for, we trust, the
benefit of the reader

CHAPTER XIII.

Showing how our travellers crossed the ancient Taurida, and
with what team they quitted it

CHAPTER XIV.

In which Kéraban proves that he is stronger in geography than
his nephew Ahmet believed

CONTENTS.

7

CHAPTER XV.

	PAGE
In which Kéraban, Ahmet, Van Mitten, and their servants play the part of Salamanders	142

CHAPTER XVI.

In which the relative merits of the tobaccos of Persia and Asia Minor are discussed	153
--	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

Wherein is related a very curious adventure, which terminates the first part of this history	164
---	-----

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

He dragged him, half-suffocated, beyond the influence of the vapours	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
"Are you certain of your crew?"	24
The tremendously steep slopes and awkward corners	59
It was a regular rain of bulbs	118
The immense illumination quite filled the plain	148
Kéraban walked up to the chief cavalier, and put his hand on the horse's bridle	172

KÉRABAN THE INFLEXIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW VAN MITTEN AND HIS VALET WALKED AND TALKED.

AT six o'clock on the evening of the 16th of August, in a certain year which need not be particularly specified, the quay of Top-Hané in Constantinople, usually so crowded and full of life and bustle, was silent—almost deserted. The view from this place over the Bosphorus was certainly a very charming one, but life was wanting to give it its full effect. Very few strangers were visible at that time, and they were hurrying on their way to Pera. The narrow, dirty, and dog-infested streets which led to what may be termed the "European" quarters, were almost free from the presence of the representatives of Western civilization. Pera is more especially affected as a residence by the Franks, whose white stone mansions contrast vividly with the dark cypress groves upon the hill.

But the quay is always picturesque, even when deprived of the rainbow hues of the various costumes worn by the passers-by. The Mosque of Mahmoud, with its graceful minarets, its pretty Arabic fountain (now deprived of its elegant roof), its shops where sweetmeats of all kinds are vended; the stalls piled with gourds, Smyrna melons, Scutari raisins, contrasting with the wares of the vendors of perfumery, and the bead sellers; the landing-place, or port, where lie hundreds of gaudy caïques, double banked, the oars of which caressed rather than struck the blue waters of the Bosphorus or the Golden Horn.

But there were at that particular time many of the habitual loungers of the Top-Hané—Persians, coquettishly crowned with head-gear of Astrachan; Greeks, balancing

the many-folded *fustanelle*; Circassians, nearly always in military dress; Georgians, still Russian in their costume, though many miles from the frontier; Armenians, saturnine and swarthy, whose sun-browned skins were perceptible between the folds of their embroidered vests; but the Turks—the Osmanlis—the sons of ancient Byzantium and old Stamboul—where were they?

Where were they? It would have been no use to question two Western strangers who, with inquisitive eyes, noses in the air, and with somewhat undecided steps, were walking almost apart upon the terrace. They could not have answered you.

But there is something more yet. In the town properly so called, beyond the port, a visitor would have remarked the same characteristic air of silence and desertion. On the other side of the Golden Horn—a deep indentation between the old Serail and the landing-place of Top-Hané on the right bank, which is united with the left by three bridges of boats—the whole of Constantinople appeared to be asleep. Was no one awake in the Palace of Serai Bourno? Were there none of the Faithful, no hadjis or pilgrims in the mosques of Ahmed, of Bayezidièh, Saint Sophia, or Suleimanieh?

Was this the hour of repose, of siesta for the careless guardian of the tower of the Seraskierat, following the example of his colleague on the tower of Galata, on both of whom devolved the duty of giving warning of the frequent fires which break out in Constantinople? The stillness even appeared to extend to the port, notwithstanding the presence of the Austrian, French and other steamers—the boats, steam launches, and caïques which passed and repassed upon the waters that laved the bases of the houses.

Was this, then, the much-vaunted Constantinople, the vision of the East realized by the will of Constantine and Mahomet II.? That is just what the two strangers above referred to were asking each other as they walked to and fro; and if they did not answer the question in Turkish, it was not for want of acquaintance with that language.

They were both well acquainted with the native tongue:

one of them because he had been employed for twenty years in correspondence and merchants' business in the country; the other because he had frequently discharged the duties of secretary to his master, even while he acted in the capacity of a domestic servant.

These men were natives of Holland, and hailed from Rotterdam. Their names were Jan Van Mitten, and Bruno, his valet, whom destiny had driven to the extreme borders of Europe.

Van Mitten, a well-known individual, was a man of forty-five or forty-six years of age, still fair-haired, of fresh complexion, with blue eyes and yellow whiskers. He wore no moustaches. His nose was rather short relatively to his face; his head was massive; he had broad shoulders; stood somewhat below the middle height, and inclined to stoutness. His feet were more remarkable for usefulness than elegance. Altogether he had the air of a brave, resolute man; he was a good specimen of his nation.

Morally speaking, perhaps, Van Mitten was of a plastic temperament, of a somewhat pliable disposition—one of those men who, while of an extremely sociable and indeed humorous turn of mind, are ready to avoid discussion and ready to cede points; more fitting to obey than to command—quiet, phlegmatic individuals, who are supposed to have no decided will of their own. They are by no means the worse for that. Once and once only during his former life Van Mitten had been engaged in a discussion, the consequences of which had been very serious.

On that occasion certainly he had come out of himself, but before long he had re-entered his shell, so to speak. It would have been better, perhaps, had he yielded, and no doubt he would have done so, could he have foreseen the consequences. But it will not do to anticipate the events which form the ground-work of this tale.

"Well, sir!" said Bruno, when he and his master had reached Top-Hané.

"Well, Bruno?"

"Here we are, sir, in Constantinople."

"Yes," replied Van Mitten; "and some thousands of miles from Rotterdam."

"Don't you think, sir, that we are quite far enough from Holland by this time?" said the valet drily.

"I do not think I can ever be too far from it," replied his master in a low voice, as if he were afraid of Holland hearing him.

In Bruno, Van Mitten possessed a most devoted servitor. This faithful valet in some respects resembled his master, as much so, indeed, as his deference would permit him to resemble that personage, with whom he had been so many years associated. For twenty years master and man had not been separated for a day. If Bruno in the house was something less than a friend, he was more than a servant. He performed his service intelligently, methodically, and did not scruple to give advice, of which Van Mitten might take advantage; or make complaints which his master would accept without remonstrance. He was very much annoyed, however, when he had to obey the orders of any but his master; yet he could not resist—in a word, he wanted "character."

It may be added that Bruno, who was at this time forty years of age, was of a rather lazy temperament; he could not bear to move about. To be able to endure an active life, one must train and get thin; but Bruno was in the habit of having himself weighed every week so as to ensure his maintaining his rotundity of form.

When he entered the service of Van Mitten he turned the scale at only one hundred pounds, which was a miserable weight for a Dutchman. But within a year afterwards he had gained thirty pounds in weight, and was not ashamed to go anywhere. To his master, therefore, he owed it that he had reached the hundred and sixty-seven pounds of flesh which he then carried about with him, and which put him in such a good position amongst his countrymen. He found it necessary also to be modest and reserved, so that in time he might arrive at the proud distinction of pulling down two hundred pounds in the scale.

In fine, Bruno, who was greatly attached to his native land, which he looked upon as the finest in Europe, or in the world for that matter, would never, unless under very urgent circumstances, have quitted Rotterdam, the first city

in Holland in his estimation, on the banks of the Nieuwe Haven canal. Nevertheless it was a fact that Bruno was then at Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

But what was Van Mitten ?

Nothing less than a rich merchant of Rotterdam ; a dealer in tobacco ; a consignee of the best products of Havana, Maryland, Virginia, and Porto Rico ; and particularly of those of Macedonia, Syria and Asia Minor.

For twenty years Van Mitten had done a considerable business of this kind with the house of Kéraban of Constantinople, who exported tobaccos all over the world. Thus it happened that in his dealings with this large Eastern house Van Mitten had picked up something of the Turkish tongue, which he soon spoke like one of the "Faithful." So also Bruno, from sympathy, and in order to be better acquainted with his patron's business, made it a point to learn the language too ; and spoke it scarcely less fluently than his master.

This pair of originals had made an agreement with each other, only to speak the Ottoman tongue in Turkey. In fact, but for their dress they might have passed for natives. This was by no means unwelcome to Van Mitten, and Bruno was too obedient to manifest his objections.

So he compelled himself to say every morning to his master,—

"Esendum emriniz nè dir?" which means, being interpreted, "Sir, what do you require?"

Then Van Mitten would reply,—

"Sitrimi pantalounymi purtcha," which signified that he required his clothes brushed.

From what has been said, the reader will now understand that Van Mitten and Bruno had no difficulty in finding their way about Constantinople, firstly because they understood the native language, and secondly because they were sure of a welcome at the "house" of Kéraban, the chief of which firm had already been in Holland, and according to the law of contrasts had struck up a great friendship with his Dutch correspondent.

For this reason Van Mitten, when he quitted Rotterdam,

made up his mind to go to Constantinople, and Bruno made no objection, though he only resigned himself to the move unwillingly. So it came to pass that master and servant found themselves on the quay of Top-Hané, in the City of the Faithful.

About this time of the evening some passers-by appeared, strangers chiefly. Then two or three Turks walked past conversing, and the keeper of a *café* established at the end of the square arranged his unfilled tables leisurely, pending the expected arrival of his customers.

"In less than an hour," remarked one of the Turks, "the sun will have dipped beneath the waves of the Bosphorus, and then—"

"And then," continued another, "we shall be able to eat and drink in comfort, and smoke at our ease."

"This Fast of Ramadan is very long."

"All fasts are tedious," was the reply, as the interlocutors passed on.

Meanwhile two strangers were exchanging opinions upon the same subject, as they paced in front of the *café*.

"These Turks are extraordinary fellows," said one. "Really, a traveller who happened to arrive in Constantinople during this melancholy Lenten season would have but a poor opinion of the capital."

"Bah," replied the other, "London is no more gay on a Sunday. If the Turks fast during the day, they make up for their abstinence at night. When the sunset gun is fired, the odour of cooking and the smoke of tobacco will arise simultaneously with the people, and the streets will resume their wonted gaiety."

It would seem that the stranger was right in his estimate, for at that moment the proprietor of the *café* called out to his waiter,—

"See that everything is prepared. In an hour we shall be overwhelmed by the flood of customers."

The two strangers meanwhile continued their conversation.

"I think that Constantinople is best worth visiting during this period of the Ramadan. If the days are sad and *triste* like a succession of Ash Wednesdays, the evenings are gay and festive as a carnival."

"There is the contrast, you see, to emphasize it."

While these men exchanged their views, the Turks were regarding them not without a kind of envy.

"They are happy, those Franks," said one of the subjects of the Sultan. "They can eat, drink, and smoke as they please."

"No doubt," replied his companion; "but they cannot at this moment procure a *kébal* of mutton, nor a *pilaw* of nice fowl and rice, nor a cake of baklava—not even a slice of water-melon or cucumber."

"Because they are ignorant of the right places in which to find them. By means of a few piastres one can always find willing vendors who have received the dispensation of the prophet."

"By Allah," said his friend, "my cigarettes are drying up in my pocket, I cannot lose so much good tobacco."

So at the risk of his future happiness, the "Believer," who paid little attention to his creed, took out a cigarette and, lighting it, puffed rapidly the perfumed weed.

"Look out," said his companion; "if some ulema less tolerant than usual should see you—"

"Oh, I can soon swallow the smoke—he will see nothing," replied the faithful one.

Thus these men continued their promenade, lounging up and down the square, and subsequently disappearing up one of the narrow streets which lead to Pera and Galata.

"This is certainly a singular city," said Bruno as he gazed around him. "Ever since we left our hotel, I have scarcely seen even the "ghost" of a native. There are only phantoms in Constantinople apparently. The people and the place seem to be equally asleep; even the dogs, yellow and lean as they are, will scarcely trouble themselves to bite you. After all that travellers have said, I cannot see the object in travelling. What do you gain by it? I would rather be in our own city of Rotterdam, under the grey sky of Holland."

"Patience, Bruno, patience," said the calm Van Mitten. "We have only been here a few hours yet. Nevertheless, I cannot say this is altogether the Constantinople I had pictured to myself. I fancied we should plunge into the

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'Arabian Nights' at once, into all the dreams of the East, and we actually find ourselves imprisoned in the depths of—"

"An immense convent," added Bruno, "in the midst of a people as sad as a Trappist priory.

"My friend Kéraban will explain to us what it all means, by-and-by," said Van Mitten.

"But where are we at this moment?" asked Bruno. "What is this place? what do they call this quay?"

"If I am not mistaken, we are on the Top-Hané," replied Van Mitten, "at the end of the Golden Horn. There is the Bosphorus, which laves the shores of Asia, and on the opposite side you may see the Seraglio Point, and the Turkish town which is raised above it.

"The Seraglio!" exclaimed Bruno. "Is that the palace of the Sultan, wherein the eighty thousand odalisques live?"

"Eighty thousand?" repeated Van Mitten, smiling; "I fancy you have estimated the number somewhat too highly—even for a Turk. In Holland we find one wife sufficient for a household, and even then one cannot always have peace!"

"Quite so; certainly, sir; let us not speak of that unless we must." Then Bruno, turning towards the *café*, said,—

"This looks like a *café*, and after his exertions, combined with this baking Turkish sun, I should not be surprised if my master would like some refreshment."

"That is one way of saying that you are thirsty," replied Van Vitten. "Well, let us enter this *café*."

So they seated themselves at one of the small tables on the *façade* of the establishment.

"Cawadjii!" cried Bruno, rapping on the table, European fashion. But as no one answered the summons, he called again more loudly.

After this second summons, the proprietor of the *café* appeared at the end of the shop, but made no signs of approaching nearer.

"Strangers," he murmured, when he caught sight of his customers. Do they really believe they can be served?" Then he came to the table.

"Cawadjii, let us have some cherry-water, quite fresh," said Van Mitten.

"At gunfire," replied the man.

"What!" exclaimed Bruno. "Cherry-water with gunfire! No, cawadjii—no—with mint!"

"If you have no cherry-water," continued Van Mitten, "let us have a glass of rose-rahtlokoum. I remember it—it is very nice."

"At gun-fire," was the answer of the proprietor, as he shrugged his shoulders.

"What does he mean by gun-fire?" asked the valet of his master.

"We shall see," replied the latter, who, always willing to be accommodating, said, "If you have not rahtlokoum, let us have a cup of coffee, some sherbet—what you please."

"At gun-fire."

"At gun-fire?" repeated Van Mitten.

"Not before," said the *café*-keeper as he unceremoniously re-entered his shop.

"Let us come away from here," said Bruno. "There is no use in remaining with this stupid Turk, who deafens us with his 'gun-fire.'"

"Come along, Bruno," said Van Mitten. "I dare say we shall find a more complaisant *café*-keeper presently."

So they made their way across the open space once more.

"I am quite of opinion, sir," said Bruno, "that we cannot meet your friend, M. Kéraban, a moment too soon. We should have known what was in store for us had he been at his house of business."

"Yes, Bruno, but we must have patience a little longer. They told us we should find him here."

"But not before seven o'clock, sir. It is hither that his *caïque* will come to take us across to his villa at Scutari, on the opposite side of the Bosphorus."

"Quite so, Bruno; and my estimable friend will soon put us *au courant* with all that is going on. He is a true Turk, one of the old conservative party, who will not permit any innovations to be made in existing circumstances ;

who protest against all modern inventions—one of those men who still prefer a coach (when they find one) to the railroad, and a sailing vessel to a steamer. During the twenty years I have known Kéraban, I have never known him to change ever so little. When, three years ago, he came to visit me in Rotterdam, he arrived in a post-chaise, and instead of eight days he had been quite a month on the journey. I have known a good many obstinate people in my time, Bruno, but of all, Kéraban is the most ‘pig-headed’ person I ever met.”

“He will be considerably astonished to meet you again in Constantinople,” said the valet.

“I fancy so,” replied Van Mitten, “and I would rather take him by surprise. At least in his company we shall be thoroughly the Turk. My friend Kéraban is not the man to adopt the costume of the Nizam, and to wear the blue coat and red fez of the modern ‘believer.’”

“When they take off their fezzes they look like bottles with the corks out,” remarked Bruno.

“Ah, my dear and inimitable Kéraban will come dressed just as he was when he visited me at the other side of Europe; he will have his turban and caftan on—”

“Just like a date merchant,” interrupted Bruno.

“Yes, like a date merchant who sells golden fruit, and who might even eat them at every meal,” replied Van Mitten. “He has the very business for this country—a merchant in tobacco. How could he fail to make his fortune in such a business in this place, where every one smokes, morning, noon and night?”

“Smoke!” exclaimed Bruno. “Where have you seen any one smoke? I have not seen any smokers at all—not one, yet I quite expected to find groups of Turks at every door smoking long curling pipes or tubes of cherry with amber mouth-pieces. But, no! Not even a cigarette, much less a cigar!”

“There is something we do not understand, depend upon it, Bruno. Why, even in Rotterdam we shall find more smokers than in the streets of Constantinople.”

“Are you quite sure that we have not mistaken the route and gone somewhere else?” continued Bruno. “Are you certain that we *are* in the Turkish capital, sir? Perhaps

after all we have come wrong, and that is the Thames yonder, and not the Golden Horn in the Bosphorus. That mosque yonder may be St. Paul's instead of St. Sophia. This Constantinople? Never. It is London!"

"Be quiet, Bruno. Moderate your spirits, you are much too volatile for a native of Holland. Be calm, patient, phlegmatic, as I am, and never be surprised at anything. We left Rotterdam, as you know—"

"Yes, yes," assented Bruno, shaking his head in a melancholy manner.

"We came by way of Paris, St. Gothard, Italy, Brindisi, and the Mediterranean, and yet you would have me believe that the Messageries steamer landed us at London Bridge after eight days' steaming—and not at Galata at all!"

"Nevertheless—" began Bruno.

"I trust," continued Van Mitten, "that you will not give way to these little eccentricities before my friend Kéraban. He might take such joking in ill part, and begin to argue in his obstinate way."

"I will take care, sir," replied Bruno. "But though one cannot obtain any refreshment, I suppose it is permissible to light a pipe. Do you see any objection to that, sir?"

"None whatever," replied his master. "In my capacity of tobacco importer, nothing pleases me more than to see people smoking. Indeed, I am extremely sorry that nature has only endowed each individual with one mouth. It is true we can consume snuff by the nose."

"And by the teeth in chewing," added Bruno.

So saying, he pulled out an enormous pipe of painted porcelain, and, having lighted it, puffed it contentedly and with evident satisfaction.

But at this moment the Turks who had so emphatically protested against the abstinence of the Ramadan, reappeared upon the quay, and the individual who had been indulging in the cigarette, at once perceived Bruno smoking his pipe. "By Allah!" he exclaimed, "here is one of those accursed Franks defying the ordinances of the Koran. I cannot suffer it."

"At least put out your own cigarette," said his companion.

"Of course," he replied ; and, throwing it away, he marched directly up to the Dutchman, who by no means expected such a meeting.

"Not till gun-fire," said the Turk, as he snatched the pipe from Bruno's lips.

"Here ; my pipe !" exclaimed Bruno, whom his master vainly tried to control.

"Dog of a Christian—not till gun-fire," said the polite Turk.

"Dog yourself, Turk," retorted Bruno, with Christian spirit.

"Be quiet, Bruno," said Van Mitten.

"Let him give me my pipe, then, at least," said the valet.

"At gun-fire," replied the Turk, as he placed the pipe in the folds of his caftan.

"Come, Bruno, it is no use to transgress the customs of the country one visits," said his master.

"Robbers' customs," said Bruno, indignantly.

"Come along, I say. My friend Kéraban will not arrive before seven o'clock. Let us resume our promenade, and we will meet him when the time comes."

So Van Mitten dragged away Bruno, who was much disgusted at being separated from his pipe, to which he clung with all the tenacity of a confirmed smoker.

As the strangers walked away, the Turks remarked one to the other,—

"Truly these Frankish strangers think they can do anything they please."

"Even to smoke before sunset !" said the other.

"Do you want a light ?" inquired his friend.

"Yes,—thank you," replied the other, as he lighted a fresh cigarette.

CHAPTER II.

HOW SCARPANTE THE STEWARD AND CAPTAIN YARHUD
DISCUSSED PROJECTS WITH WHICH THE READER
MUST BECOME ACQUAINTED.

WHILE Van Mitten and Bruno were promenading upon the Top-Hané, and at the moment they reached the first bridge of boats which puts Galata in communication with the ancient Stamboul, a Turk rapidly turned the corner of the Mosque of Mahmoud and halted in the open space beyond it.

It was then six o'clock in the afternoon. For the fourth time that day the muezzins were mounting the minarets to call the people to prayer, and their voices were soon heard calling out the formula—"There is but one God, and Mahomet is His Prophet."

The Turk who had arrived so hastily upon the scene, turned about and gazed intently at the few passers-by. He then advanced to the meeting-place or axis of all the streets, with a view to obtain the greatest range in all directions. But the object of his quest had not appeared, and the Turk manifested considerable impatience.

"So Yarhud has not come," he muttered. "He knows he ought to have been here punctually at the appointed time!"

The Turk then took a few turns up and down the open space, and advanced as far as the northern angle of the barracks, whence he gazed in the direction of the cannon-foundry, as he stood tapping his foot upon the ground impatiently. Then he turned back again to the *café* at which Van Mitten and Bruno had vainly demanded refreshments. Here he seated himself at one of the empty tables, but was too careful to summon the waiter, for, being a scrupulous observer of the Ramadan, he knew the time

had not yet arrived for indulging in any of the various products of the Ottoman distilleries.

This individual's name was Scarpante, the intendant or steward of the Seigneur Saffar, a rich Turk who lived at Trebizond.

Saffar himself was at that particular time travelling in Southern Russia, and intended to return to Trebizond when he had visited the Caucasian provinces, never doubting that his intendant would meanwhile have succeeded in carrying to a successful termination an enterprise with which he had been specially charged. Scarpante was to rejoin him at his palatial residence when he had accomplished his mission, which Saffar never admitted to himself even was likely to fail. He could not conceive that any emissary of his should not succeed when he had commanded success, and backed his orders with the powerful aid of money. In everything he acted with the ostentation which is characteristic of these " nabobs " of Asia Minor.

The steward was a very audacious fellow, an adept at all enterprises which required skill and force to carry them out. He hesitated at nothing to carry out his master's designs, which were put through *per fas et nefas*. It was upon one of these desperate undertakings that he arrived in Constantinople, and that he was then awaiting the meeting with a certain Maltese captain, who was no better than himself.

The captain's name was Yarhud; he was commander of a felucca—the *Guidare*—and made periodical voyages across the Black Sea. To his ordinary smuggling he added even a less creditable trade, that of carrying black slaves from the Soudan, Ethiopia, or Egypt, and others from Georgia and Circassia. The market for these human commodities was at that very corner of Top-Hané—a market in regard to which the Government, very conveniently, shut its eyes.

Scarpante was still waiting, but the captain did not come. Although the intendant remained outwardly impassible and nothing betrayed his feelings, he was inwardly boiling with indignation.

"Where is the dog?" he muttered. "Has any accident happened to him? He ought to have quitted Odessa the



"Are you certain of your crew?"

day before yesterday. He should now be here on this spot at this *café* at this hour, for which I gave him rendez-vous."

As he finished his half-articulate speech, a Maltese sailor appeared at the angle of the quay. This man was Yarhud. He glanced right and left, and perceived Scarpante, who immediately rose and advanced to meet the captain of the *Guidare* in the midst of the increasing numbers of the passers-by.

"I am not accustomed to be kept waiting, Yarhud," was Scarpante's address, in a tone the Maltese could not fail to understand.

"You must forgive me," said the captain; "I made all possible haste."

"You have only this moment arrived?"

"This instant by the Janboli and Adrianople Railway, and had not the train been late—"

"When did you leave Odessa?"

"Two days ago."

"Where is your vessel?"

"Waiting for me there,—in Odessa Harbour."

"Are you certain of your crew?"

"Absolutely. They are all Maltese like myself; and devoted—to generous paymasters!"

"They will obey your orders, then?"

"Certainly; in everything."

"Good. What news have you, Yarhud?"

"Well, both 'goodan d bad news," replied the captain, lowering his voice.

"Let us have the bad news first, then," said Scarpante.

"Very well. The bad news is that the girl Amasia—Selim's, the Odessa banker's daughter—is about to be married, soon. So her kidnapping will be a more difficult matter, and will have to be accomplished more hurriedly than if she were not to be married so quickly."

"The marriage must not take place, Yarhud," said Scarpante, in a tone louder than was altogether prudent. "No, by the Prophet, it must not take place."

"I did not say that it *would*," replied Yarhud. "I said that it had been arranged to take place."

"Quite so. But my lord Saffar is under the impression that in three days the young lady will have been carried on board your ship and bound for Trebizond. Now, if you think that impossible—"

"I never said it was impossible, Scarpante. Nothing is impossible when audacity and money are combined. I merely said that the enterprise will be more difficult under the circumstances; that is all."

"Difficult!" exclaimed Scarpante contemptuously. "This will not be the first time that a Turkish girl, or a young Russian lady, has disappeared from Odessa!"

"And it won't be the last time, or the captain of the *Guidare* will know the reason why," replied Yarhud.

"Who is the fellow who wants to marry Amasia?" asked Scarpante.

"A young Turk; of the same race as Amasia herself," was the reply.

"From Odessa?"

"No; of Constantinople."

"What is his name?"

"Ahmet."

"Who is this Ahmet, then?"

"Nephew and sole heir of a rich merchant of Galata, Seigneur Kéraban."

"What is his business?"

"Tobacco, in which he has made an immense fortune. Selim the banker is his correspondent at Odessa. They have put through some very important business together, and often pay each other visits. Under these circumstances, Amasia and Ahmet have become acquainted; and so the marriage has been arranged by the father of the girl and the uncle of the young man."

"Where is the marriage fixed to take place?" asked Scarpante. "Will it be solemnized here, in Constantinople?"

"No; at Odessa."

"When?"

"I do not know; but if young Ahmet's wishes are consulted, it may be any day."

"So we have no time to lose, eh?"

"Not an instant."

"Where is this Ahmet now?"

"At Odessa."

"And Keraban?"

"Here; in Constantinople."

"Did you see this young man, Yarhud, while you were passing through Odessa?"

"I had a particular object in seeing him, and in taking notice of him. I have seen him, and know him."

"What kind of man is he?"

"A young, and rather interesting fellow; very acceptable to the banker's daughter too."

"Is he to be feared, think you?"

"They say he is both brave and resolute, and in this business at any rate we must reckon with him."

"Is he independent, in fortune, I mean?" continued Scarpante, who kept putting leading questions concerning the young man, who gave him some uneasiness.

"No," replied Yarhud: "Ahmet is entirely dependent upon his uncle and guardian, Kéraban, who loves him as a son; and he will no doubt soon go to Odessa, so as to be present at the marriage."

"Cannot we find some means to prevent the Seigneur Kéraban from going thither?" suggested Scarpante.

"That certainly would be a good thing to do, and would give us more time; but in what way do you propose to prevent him?"

"The way I must leave to your invention," replied Scarpante. "But bear in mind the wishes of Seigneur Saffar *must* be carried out, and the young Amasia must be carried off to Trebizond. It will not be the first visit of the *Guidare* to that part of the coast, and you know how your services will be remunerated."

"I know!" replied Yarhud briefly.

"My patron, Saffar, saw the girl, though only for an instant, in his house at Odessa. Her beauty has made a deep impression on him, and she will not complain of the exchange from the banker's home to the palace at Trebizond. Amasia will surely be carried off, Yarhud; and if not by you, by some one else."

"I will do it: you may be depend upon me," replied the

Maltese simply. "But as I have told you the bad news, let me now tell you more favourable tidings."

"Speak!" said Scarpante, who, after pacing up and down in a thoughtful attitude, returned to his companion.

"If this projected marriage renders it more difficult to carry the girl off, since Ahmet will not be long absent from her, I will find opportunity to enter the banker's house. The fact is, I am not only the captain of the *Guidare*, but a merchant. My vessel carries a rich cargo; silk stuffs, brocades enriched with diamonds, and a hundred kindred articles, calculated to attract the attention of a young girl about to be married. At that time, too, she will be all the more easily tempted. I shall be able to attract her on board, and then, taking advantage of a favourable wind, I shall be able to put to sea before her absence has caused any alarm."

"That seems a good notion, Yarhud," replied Scarpante; "and I have no doubt you will succeed. But you must be very careful to keep all this a profound secret."

"You may make your mind quite easy on that point, Scarpante."

"You are not in want of money, I suppose?"

"No; there is no fear of that where your generous patron is concerned."

"Well, now lose no time. The marriage once contracted, Amasia will be Ahmet's wife, and it is not in that capacity that my lord wishes to see her at Trebizond."

"I quite understand."

"Very well. As soon as the banker's daughter is on board the *Guidare* you will set sail."

"Yes, for before I make my advances I will wait for a favourable breeze—a steady westerly wind."

"How long do you anticipate it will take you to run from Odessa to Trebizond?"

"With possible delays, calms or changes of wind—for the wind is very uncertain in the Black Sea—the voyage may perhaps occupy three weeks."

"Good!" replied Scarpante. "I will make my way to Trebizond about that time, and my patron will not be long after me."

"I hope to be there before you," said Yarhud.

"The orders of my master," continued the intendant, "are very strict concerning the treatment of the young lady. Every consideration possible is to be shown her. There must be no violence or ill-treatment, mind!"

"She shall be treated with as much respect as the Seigneur Saffar can desire, and with as much deference as if he were present himself," replied Yarhud.

"I count upon your zeal, Yarhud."

"You shall have it, Scarpante."

"And upon your skill and address."

"In truth, I shall be all the more certain to succeed if the wedding be postponed," said Yarhud; "and it will be if some obstacle can be put in Seigneur Kéraban's way so as to prevent his departure."

"Do you know this great merchant?"

"It is always as well to know one's enemies, or those who may become such," replied the Maltese. "Thus my first care on my arrival here was to present myself at his office under the pretext of doing some business."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Just for an instant, but that was enough; and—"

At the same moment Yarhud suddenly approached Scarpante and whispered,—

"Eh! this is a singular coincidence, isn't it? Perhaps it may prove a happy chance for us."

"What do you mean?" inquired Scarpante.

"Look at yonder stout man descending the Rue de Pera accompanied by his servant."

"Is that he?"

"The very same," replied the captain. "Let us keep aloof, but we will not lose sight of him. I know that he returns every evening to his house at Scutari, and if necessary I will follow him to the other side of the Bosphorus, and find out when he proposes to start for Odessa."

Scarpante and Yarhud then mixed with the other pedestrians, but in such a manner as to observe Kéraban and to overhear his orders. As far all the easier inasmuch as "my lord Kéraban," as they called him, always spoke in a very loud tone, and never attempted to conceal his imposing person nor his sentiments.

CHAPTER III.

HOW KÉRABAN MET VAN MITTEN, AND WAS GREATLY SURPRISED AT HIS APPEARANCE.

"My lord Kéraban," was very much "on the surface," to employ a modern term. This was the case physically as well as morally. He was, in face, about forty years old, at least fifty in his figure, and actually forty-five. Yet his face was intelligent, his figure majestic. He wore a beard, turning grey, which was cut rather close, and divided into two points. His eyes were black and piercing, as sensitive to passing impressions as the most delicately adjusted scales to the weight of a grain. His chin was square, his nose somewhat hooked, and this feature added to the natural piercing appearance of the dark eyes. His lips were parted sufficiently to display his white and even teeth. His forehead was high, and displayed a vertical fold or line—a true type of obstinacy—between the bushy black brows. Kéraban's face was peculiar, and one not easily forgotten by any one who had ever seen it, if only once.

Kéraban, in his dress, remained faithful to the old Turkish costume of the time of the Janissaries. The large turban, the capacious trousers, the sleeveless waistcoat garnished with enormous buttons, the shawl around the waist already sufficiently developed by nature, and, finally, the caftan with its majestic folds. There was nothing European in this style of dress, which contrasted strongly with the modern costume of the Orientals. It was designed to repress the invasions of industrial enterprise, a protest in favour of local colour which had a tendency to disappear, a defiance hurled at the edicts of the Sultan Mahmoud, who had upheld the modern costume of the Turk.

It is scarcely necessary to add that Seigneur Kéraban had a servant—a man about twenty-five years of age,

named Nizib, so thin as to drive Bruno to desperation, and clad in the same ancient costume as his master. As he never contradicted his master in words, so he assimilated himself to Kéraban in dress. He was a devoted valet, but absolutely devoid of any ideas of his own. He always said "Yes" in advance; and, like an echo, repeated unconsciously the last phrase of the influential merchant. This was the surest way of being of his master's opinion and to avoid reprimands, of which the Seigneur Kéraban was prodigal.

Both master and man reached the Top-Hané by one of the narrow streets which descend from Pera. Kéraban as usual was speaking in a very loud voice, without caring whether or not he was overheard.

"Well," he was saying, "may Allah protect us, but in the time of the Janissaries every one had the right to do as his fancy dictated, when evening had set in. No; I will not submit to these new police regulations, and I will go by the streets without a lanthorn, if it please me to do so, although I may tumble into a puddle or break my legs over a stray dog."

"Stray dog," assented Nizib the Echo.

"So you need not worry me with your stupid remonstrances," continued Kéraban, "or by Mahomet I will pull your ears so long that an ass will be jealous of you, as well as the driver."

"The driver," said Nizib, who, by the way, had not ventured upon a single expostulation, as one may imagine.

"If the inspector of police fine me, I will pay the fine: if he put me in arrest, I will go to prison. But I will never give way on this point, nor on any other."

Nizib made a sign of assent. He was quite ready to follow his master to prison if circumstances so fell out.

"Ah, you new-fashioned Turks," exclaimed Kéraban, as some Constantinopolitans, clothed in their modern dress, passed him. "Ah, you would make laws, and alter our old customs, would you? Ah, when I cease to protest. . . . Nizib, did you tell my *caïdji* to wait with the *caïque* at the steps of Top-Hané at seven o'clock?"

"Yes, at seven o'clock."

"Why is it not there?"

"Why *is* it not there?" echoed Nizib.

"I suppose because it is not yet seven."

"It is not yet seven."

"How do you know that?"

"Because you say so," replied Nizib.

"Suppose I were to say it was five o'clock?"

"Then it would be five o'clock," said the human echo.

"One is not so stupid as that!"

"No, not so stupid," was the answer.

"This fellow by such constant agreement will end by causing disagreement," muttered Kéraban.

At this moment Van Mitten and Bruno reappeared, and the latter kept urging his master to leave the city.

"Let us go on," he said, "by the first train. This Constantinople, indeed! This the capital of the Commander of the Faithful! Never!"

"Be quiet, Bruno," said Van Mitten; "calm yourself."

The sun was setting and had already dipped behind the hills of old Stamboul, leaving the Top-Hané in a sort of penumbra. The twilight prevented Van Mitten from recognizing Kéraban as they crossed the quay from opposite directions; but it so happened that they met, and each, in his anxiety to pass, got in the other's way. This produced a balancing movement which is ridiculous to a beholder.

"Well, monsieur, I may pass, surely!" said Kéraban, who was not a man to yield the path to any one.

"But—" said Van Mitten, who in his anxiety to be polite effectually precluded the passage.

"I tell you I will pass, sir."

"But—" again said the Dutchman, and he was about to explain when he suddenly recognized the man with whom he had such important business.

"What! My friend Kéraban?" he cried.

"You!" exclaimed Kéraban. "You! here—in Constantinople?"

"Yes, 'tis I," replied Van Mitten.

"Since when have you been here?"

"Since this morning."

"And you did not call on me the very first—"

"On the contrary," replied the Dutchman, "I went to your office, but you were not there, and they told me I should find you here at seven o'clock."

"They were right," replied Kéraban, shaking the hand of his correspondent with great vigour. "My dear Van Mitten, I never—no, never—expected to see you in Constantinople. Why did you not write?"

"I quitted Holland so hurriedly."

"On business?"

"No, simply travelling for a change. I had never been in Constantinople, nor in Turkey at all, and I wished to return the visit you paid me in Rotterdam."

"Very good. But how is it Madame van Mitten is not with you?"

"Well, the fact is, I did not bring her," replied the Dutchman, hesitating. "Madame van Mitten is not so easily moved. So I came alone with my valet Bruno."

"Ah, yonder lad," said Kéraban, nodding at Bruno, who believed he ought to bow to the Turk with his hands to his forehead, like the arms of a semaphore.

"Yes," replied Van Mitten. "He wished to leave me just now and go—"

"Go away!" exclaimed Kéraban. "Go home again without my permission!"

"Yes, he finds your capital too dull. There is no life about it, he thinks."

"It is nothing but a matssoleum," said Bruno. "There is no one in the shops, there are no carriages in the streets. There are only ghosts in the city, and one cannot even smoke a pipe!"

"But it is the Ramadan, Van Mitten," said Kéraban. "We are in full fast!"

"Ah, so this is the Ramadan," said Bruno. "Well now, if you please, what is the Ramadan?"

"A time of fasting and abstinence," replied Kéraban.

"While it lasts we are forbidden to drink, smoke, or eat—that is between the rising and setting of the sun. But in half an hour hence a cannon will signify the close of the day."

"Ah, now I understand what those fellows meant by their cannon-shots!" exclaimed Bruno.

"We recompense ourselves fully during the night, though, for the abstinence practised by day," continued Kéraban.

"So," said Bruno to Nizib, "you have had nothing since morning because it is Ramadan?"

"Because it is Ramadan," replied Nizib.

"Well, that system would very soon make me thin," exclaimed Bruno. "Why, it costs me a pound a day to live, at least!"

"At least," assented Nizib.

"But," continued Kéraban, addressing Van Mitten, "wait until after sunset: you will be astonished. You will perceive a complete transformation—a dead city will prove a living one. Ah, you new-fashioned Turks, you have not yet entirely concealed the old customs under your modern veneer. The Koran holds good against all your absurdities. May Mahomet strangle you!"

"Good friend Kéraban," replied Van Mitten, "I perceive you are still faithful to your ancient usage."

"It is more than fidelity, Van Mitten; it is obstinacy. But tell me, my worthy friend: you will remain some time in Constantinople, will you not?"

"Yes; and even—"

"Well, then, you belong to me. I will take care of you and be responsible. You shall not leave me."

"So be it; I am yours," said Van Mitten.

"And you, Nizib, you must look after yonder valet," added Kéraban, indicating Bruno. "I charge you particularly to modify his ideas concerning our wonderful capital."

Nizib made a sign of assent, and at once carried Bruno away into the midst of the crowd, which was becoming more and more compact.

"Now I think of it," said Kéraban suddenly, "you have come very opportunely, Van Mitten. Six weeks later I should have been far away from Constantinople."

"You, Kéraban?"

"Yes; I should have embarked for Odessa by that time."

"For Odessa! Indeed!"

"Well, if you remain so long, we can go to Odessa together. Why should you not accompany me, eh?"

"Why, you see—"

"Nonsense: you will come, won't you?"

"I rather counted upon resting after such a long and fatiguing journey."

"Very well, you shall rest here. Then you can repose at Odessa afterwards for three weeks."

"Kéran, my friend—" began the Dutchman.

"I won't listen to you, Van Mitten. You are not going to annoy me at our very first meeting, I suppose? You know I am right, and am not easily put off."

"Yes, I know," said Van Mitten; "yet—"


"Besides," continued his friend, "you do not know my nephew Ahmet, and you really must become acquainted with him."

"You have already spoken of your nephew to me—"

"Say rather, my son: but I have no child. Business, you know; all business. I never have had five minutes to spare to get married in."

"One minute is enough," replied Van Mitten seriously; "and very often one minute is too long."

"You will meet Ahmet at Odessa," said Kéran. "A charming fellow. He detests business, for instance; he is somewhat of an artist, and trifles with the Muses; but charming, charming! He resembles his uncle in nothing, and obeys him without argument."

"Friend Kéran—" 

"Yes, yes; I understand: it is for his wedding that we are going to Odessa."

"His wedding!"

"Certainly. Ahmet is going to marry a lovely girl, Amasia, daughter of my banker Selim—a true Turk—like myself. We shall have a regular *fête*; it will be splendid. You will be there."

"But I should prefer—if—"

"It is all arranged," interrupted the inflexible Kéran, cutting short Van Mitten's last feeble protest. "You can never have the face to resist me."

"I should like to—"

"But you can't. There!"

At that moment Scarpante and the Maltese captain, who had been walking up and down the open space, approached the two friends. Seigneur Kéraban was saying to his companion,—

"That's understood. In six weeks at latest, we will start for Odessa together."

"And the wedding will take place—"

"As soon as we arrive," replied Kéraban.

Yarhud whispered to Scarpante,—

"Six weeks! We have plenty of time."

"Yes, but not too much; however, the more the better," replied his friend. "Don't forget, Yarhud, that before the six weeks have passed, Seigneur Saffar will have returned to Trebizond."

So they continued their promenade, but with eyes and ears open.

Meantime Kéraban had continued his conversation with Van Mitten.

"My friend Selim," he said, "is always hurried, and my nephew is in tremendous haste and more impatient still for the conclusion of the marriage. I must tell you that they have some reason for their impatience. The young lady must be married before she is seventeen, or she will lose a fortune of one hundred thousand pounds (Turkish¹) which an old fool of an aunt has left her under that condition. Her seventeen years will expire in six weeks. So I made her listen to reason, and told her that the marriage need not take place till the end of next month.

"Your friend Selim has no objection, then?"

"Naturally, none."

"And Ahmet—"

"He is most willing, of course. He adores Amasia, and I approve. He has plenty of time for marrying, and has no business at all. You can understand his anxiety, being a married man, Van Mitten."

"Yes, oh, certainly!" replied the Dutchman. "But it is a long time ago, and I can scarcely remember all about it."

¹ About 90,000*l.* English money.

"But, though in Turkey we are forbidden by etiquette to inquire concerning the health of our friends' wives, it is not forbidden in the case of strangers. I hope Madame van Mitten is quite well?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. Quite well; very well indeed," replied Van Mitten, who did not appear very much at his ease. "Yes, perfectly well. But always suffering, you know. Women, as you are aware—"

"No, no; I don't know anything about them," interrupted Kéraban. "Women! No. Business, as much as you like. Macedonian tobacco for the cigarettes, Persian for the narghilés. My correspondents at Salonica, Erzeroum, Latakia, Bafra, Trebizond, not omitting my good friend Van Mitten of Rotterdam. For thirty years, I have exported tobacco from these places to the four corners of Europe."

"And smoked them too!" said Van Mitten.

"Yes, smoked too, like a factory chimney; and may I ask you, do you know anything better in the world?"

"Certainly not, friend Kéraban."

"I have smoked for forty years, my friend: faithful to my chibouque and my narghilé. They constitute my whole harem, and there is not a woman in the world that I value at a pipe of *tompéki*."

"I am quite of your opinion," replied the Dutchman.

"Now that I have got you here," said Kéraban, "I am going to keep you. You shall not escape me. My catque is coming to meet me and carry me across the Bosphorus. I dine at my villa at Scutari, and will carry you across."

"That is, of course, if—"

"I will carry you across," reiterated Kéraban, "do you hear? So, make up your mind; are you going to make excuses?"

"No, I accept," replied Van Mitten. "I am yours, body and soul."

"You shall see what a charming place I have got. I built it myself, under the cypress-trees, half-way up the hill of Scutari, in full view of the Bosphorus and Constantinople. Ah, your true Turk is always on the Asiatic side. Here we have Europe—yonder is Asia, and our progressionists in frock coats cannot carry their ideas so far.

They would stultify themselves if they crossed the Bosphorus. Come, let us go to dinner."

"You may do as you please with me," replied Van Mitten, resigning himself to his impetuous friend.

"And you cannot help yourself," he replied. Then turning round he called out, "Nizib! Where is Nizib?"

The valet, who was walking about with Bruno, came hurrying up with him when he heard his master's voice.

"Has the car^dji arrived with the carque?" inquired Kéraban.

"With the carque!" said Nizib.

"I will thrash him, he may be sure. Yes, he shall have a hundred strokes of the stick."

"Oh!" exclaimed Van Mitten.

"Five hundred," continued Kéraban angrily.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bruno.

"A thousand," cried the merchant, "if he disappoints me!"

"Scigneur Kéraban," said Nizib, "I see your boatman. He has quitted Seraglio Point, and in ten minutes will have reached the steps yonder."

While Kéraban loitered about with impatience, leaning upon the arm of Van Mitten, Yarhud and Scarpante did not cease to observe him closely.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWING HOW SEIGNEUR KÉRABAN, MORE HEADSTRONG THAN EVER, CAME INTO COLLISION WITH THE TURKISH AUTHORITIES.

HOWEVER, as it proved, the caïdji had arrived, and he came to inform Kéraban that his caïque was waiting at the steps.

These "caïdjis" may be numbered in hundreds on the waters of the Bosphorus, and the Golden Horn. Their boats are impelled by two rowers, one in front, the other astern, and can be rowed in either direction at will. They are about fifteen or twenty feet long, made of beech or cypress wood, carved and painted. It is astonishing with what rapidity these graceful boats glide about and cross each other's course on the splendid stretch of water that separates the two continents. The influential corporation of watermen (caïdjis) is charged with maintaining the service from the Sea of Marmora as far as the Château d'Europe and the Château d'Asie, which face each other at the mouth of the Bosphorus.

The caïdjis are generally respectable men, dressed in a kind of shirt of silk—a many-coloured "yelek" embroidered with gold, and short white cotton drawers. They wear a fez, and shoes, their arms and legs are naked.

If the caïdji daily employed by Seigneur Kéraban to row him from Scutari to Constantinople had been harshly received for his delay, one must not be surprised. The phlegmatic boatman did not make any complaint; he knew very well he had an excellent customer, and made no answer. He merely indicated the steps at which the boat was moored.

Then Kéraban, accompanied by Van Mitten and followed

by Bruno and Nizib, proceeded to the place of embarkation, but halted when a movement was perceived amongst the crowd on the Top-Hané.

"What is the matter yonder?" asked Kéraban.

At that moment the chief of the police of Galata, accompanied by several of his men, was perceived upon the "place." A drummer and a bugler accompanied them. The former beat the "ruffle" and the latter blew a "call," and by these means succeeded in imposing silence upon the crowd, which was composed of very heterogeneous elements—Asiatic and European.

"Here is some other iniquitous proclamation, no doubt," muttered Kéraban, in the tone of a man who was determined to stand upon his rights everywhere and always.

The chief of police then drew from his pocket a paper, which was embellished with the official seals; and in a loud voice read the contents as follows:—

"By command of the Muchir, President of the Council of the Police:—An impost of ten paras from this day will be demanded from every one who may cross the Bosphorus from Constantinople to Scutari, or from Scutari to Constantinople, by caïque, or by any other species of vessel, by steam or sail. Whosoever refuses to pay this tax shall be arrested, sent to prison, and fined for his contumacy.

"Given at the Palace, the 16th of the present month,
(Signed) THE MUCHIR."

Murmurs of discontent arose when this novel tax was thus proclaimed. The impost was equal to about five centimes or one halfpenny a head.

"Very good! Another tax!" exclaimed an old Turk sarcastically, who ought to have been accustomed to these exactions so capriciously demanded by the Financiers of the Padischah.

"Ten paras! The price of a small cup of coffee," remarked another gloomily.

The chief of police, knowing very well that Turks, like other people, will grumble, but pay nevertheless, was about to quit the Top-Hané when Kéraban accosted him.

"So," said he, "there's a new tax imposed upon all those who cross the Bosphorus?"

"By proclamation of the Muchir," replied the chief of police. "But," he added, "surely the rich Kéraban is not complaining of it?"

"Yes, the rich Kéraban," replied that individual.

"And you are quite well, Seigneur Kéraban, I hope?"

"Quite well; as well as taxes will permit. Now, is this tax already imposed?"

"Certainly. Since the proclamation was issued."

"And if I wish to go across to Scutari this evening in my caïque, as I usually do—"

"You must pay ten paras."

"And as I cross the Bosphorus every morning and evening—"

"That will cost you twenty paras a day," replied the chief of police. "A mere nothing for the rich Seigneur Kéraban."

"Indeed!" was the answer.

"My master will get into some scrape," muttered Nizib to Bruno.

"He must give way though, eventually," said Bruno.

"He—give way? You don't know him yet," replied Nizib.

Meanwhile, Seigneur Kéraban, folding his arms and staring into the very soul of the chief of the police, appeared to be working himself up into a nice little passion. He spoke at length in a voice in which his irritation was very evident.

"Well, there is my boatman, who has come to tell me that my caïque is waiting for me; and as my friend Van Mitten, and my servant and his will accompany me—"

"You will have to pay forty paras," replied the officer; "and, as I said before, you can very easily afford such a trifle."

"That I have the means to pay forty paras, or a hundred, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand is nothing to the purpose," replied Kéraban. "But I will pay nothing, and I will cross just the same."

"I am very sorry to oppose Seigneur Kéraban," replied the chief of the police, "but he cannot pass without payment."

"He will pass without paying."

"No, indeed!"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Friend Kéraban," began Van Mitten, with the laudable intention of making this headstrong individual listen to reason, "my friend—"

"Let me alone, Van Mitten," retorted Kéraban angrily. "This tax is perfectly iniquitous, vexatious. It ought not to be submitted to. Never—no, never would the old *régime* have dared to levy a tax upon the *caïques* on the Bosphorus."

"Well, at any rate, the new *régime* have need of money," remarked the chief of police, "and they have not hesitated to do so."

"We shall see about that," said Kéraban.

"Guard," said the chief, addressing his men, "you will see that the new proclamation is carried out."

"Come, Van Mitten," said Kéraban, stamping his foot. "Bruno, Nizib, follow us."

"You must pay forty paras," remarked the chief of police quietly.

"Forty blows of the stick," replied Kéraban irritably. But scarcely had he advanced towards the steps where the *caïque* lay, when the guard surrounded him and his friends, and obliged them to retrace their steps.

"Let me pass!" he exclaimed, putting himself into a defiant attitude. "Do not dare to touch me, any of you, even with the tips of your fingers! I will pass, by Allah! and that too without the loss of a single para."

"Yes, you may pass, certainly; through the prison-door," replied the chief of police, who was getting rather excited also; "and you will pay a pretty fine before you come out again."

"I will go to Scutari."

"Not by crossing the Bosphorus; and as it is impossible to go any other way—"

"You think so, do you?" sneered Kéraban, who with

clenched hands and red face looked quite apoplectic. "You think so ; well, then, I will go to Scutari, and I will not cross the Bosphorus, neither will I pay the fine."

"Really!"

"Even if I have to go all round the Black Sea," said Kéraban in conclusion.

"Seven hundred leagues to save ten paras!" exclaimed the chief of police, shrugging his shoulders.

"Seven hundred leagues! A thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand!" shouted Kéraban the obstinate; "were it a question of only five—two—or even a single para."

"But, my friend—" began Van Mitten.

"Let me alone, I tell you!" exclaimed Kéraban, putting him aside.

"He is off now," muttered Bruno.

"And," continued Kéraban to the chief of police, "I will go through Turkey and the Chersonese, I will cross the Caucasus, walk through Anatolia, and reach Scutari without having paid a single para of your iniquitous impost."

"We shall see about that," responded the chief of police.

"You shall see it all," retorted Kéraban, now thoroughly roused, "and I will start this evening."

"*Diable!*" exclaimed Captain Yarhud to his friend Scarpante, who had not lost a word of this discussion. "This will rather disarrange our plans!"

"Yes, indeed," replied the other. "A very little would induce this headstrong fellow to persist in his mad project; and if so, he will pass Odessa, when the marriage may be concluded."

"But," again said Van Mitten to Kéraban, with the hope of dissuading him from his mad project, "you must—"

"Will you be quiet? Leave me alone!" said Kéraban.

"Remember the marriage of your nephew Ahmet," said Van Mitten persistently.

"We will see that is completed."

Scarpante then whispered to Yarhud aside,—

"We have not an hour to lose."

"You are right," replied the Maltese captain, "and early to-morrow morning I will start for Odessa by the railway."

Then these two worthies withdrew from the crowd, and as they turned away, Kéraban called out to his servant,—

"Nizib," he said.

"Yes, sir!"

"Follow me to the counting-house."

"To the counting-house," replied Nizib.

"And you too, Van Mitten," added Kéraban.

"I?"

"And you also, Bruno."

"Yes, but—"

"We will go all together."

"Eh!" exclaimed Bruno, pricking up his ears.

"Yes; I have invited you to dinner at Scutari," said the Seigneur Kéraban to Van Mitten; "and, by Allah, at Scutari you shall dine—when we return."

"But we shall not be back for—how long?" said Bruno.

"Not for a month, a year, ten years, perhaps," replied Kéraban in a tone that admitted of no discussion. "You have accepted my invitation to dinner, and my dinner you shall eat!"

"It will have got cold by that time," muttered Bruno.

"Will you allow me, friend Kéraban—"

"I will allow you nothing, friend Van Mitten. Come."

So saying, Kéraban advanced a few steps towards the end of the promenade.

"We are quite unable to withstand this 'pig-headed' fellow," said Van Mitten to Bruno.

"But are you really going to yield to such caprice, sir?"

"Whether I remain here, or go elsewhere, it is all the same to me, so long as we do not touch Rotterdam," replied his master.

"But, sir—"

"And since I follow my friend Kéraban, you have no alternative but to follow me," continued Van Mitten.

"Here is a pretty complication!" remarked the valet.

"Let us be off," cried Kéraban, who then addressed himself to the chief of the police in a sneering tone, calculated to exasperate that official.

"I am going," he said. "I shall depart despite all your arrests. I will go to Scutari without crossing the Bosphorus."

"I will do myself the pleasure of witnessing your return from such a strange journey," replied the chief of police.

"I shall be extremely glad to meet you on my return," responded Kéraban politely.

"But I may as well inform you that if the tax is still in force when you come back—"

"Well?" said Kéraban.

"I cannot let you pass from Scutari to Constantinople across the Bosphorus without paying the ten paras per head."

"Well, then, if your iniquitous impost is still in force when I return, I will find out some way of crossing to Constantinople without paying a single para: there!"

So saying, Kéraban took Van Mitten's arm and made a sign to Nizib and Bruno to follow them. The party quickly disappeared amid the crowd, which cheered this partisan of the old Turkish *régime* who was so tenacious of his rights.

Just then the report of a cannon was heard. The sun was setting beyond the Sea of Marmora: the Fast of Ramadan was at an end, and the faithful subjects of the Sultan might now indemnify themselves for the privations of that long day.

As suddenly as by means of an enchanter's wand Constantinople was transformed. To the silence of the Top-Hané succeeded cries of joy and pleasure. Cigarettes and every description of pipe were immediately produced and lighted: the air was odorous with tobacco. The *cafés* were quickly crowded to overflowing by hungry and thirsty customers. All kinds of pastry and sweetmeats and more solid food were eaten, and every known beverage appeared on the tables as if by magic. The shops were brilliantly

illuminated, and the transformation was complete in the twinkling of an eye.

Then the old town and its new quarters were lighted up as magically. The mosques—St. Sophia, the Suleimanieh, Sultan-Ahmed, all the civil and religious edifices from Serai Burnou as far as the hills of Eyoub, were crowned with many-coloured fires. Luminous verses were suspended from one minaret to another, tracing the precepts of the Koran upon the dark background of the sky. The Bosphorus, studded by the lanthorns carried by the caïques which were tossed about by the waves, scintillated as if the stars had fallen upon the water. The palace upon the margin, the villas on both the European and the Asiatic sides, Scutari, the ancient Chrysopolis, and its houses built up in amphitheatre form, by stages ; presented only lines of fire which were reflected from the sparkling sea.

From the far distance resounded the notes of the tambourine, the lute, or guitar, the tabourka, the rebek, and the flute ; mingled with the chanting of hymns and psalms of evensong, for the dying day. And at the summits of the minarets, the muezzins, in the call of three prolonged notes, sent over the city—the city now in festive array—the last summons to the evening prayer, which consists of one Turkish with two Arabic words, *Allah, Hækk Kebir !*

CHAPTER V.

HOW SEIGNEUR KÉRABAN DISCUSSED HIS JOURNEY, AND
HOW HE QUITTED CONSTANTINOPLE.

TURKEY in Europe actually comprehends three principal provinces, Roumania (Thrace and Macedonia), Albania, and Thessaly, and a tributary province, Bulgaria. It is only since the treaty of 1878, that the kingdom of Roumahia, with the principalities of Servia and Montenegro, have been declared independent, and Austria occupied Bosnia, less the "sanjak" of Novi Bazar.

Seigneur Kéraban, when he made up his mind to follow the littoral of the Black Sea, perceived he would have to proceed by the coasts of Roumelia, Bulgaria, and Roumania to reach the Russian frontier. Thence crossing Bessarabia, the Chersonese, Tauridis, or even the Tcherkess country, over the Caucasus and Transcaucasia, the route would turn southward and eastward by the Euxine to the limit which separates Russia from the Ottoman Empire.

Afterwards, by the littoral of Anatolia to the south of the Black Sea, the most headstrong of Ottomans would reach the Bosphorus at Scutari once again without having paid the newly imposed tax.

In fact, he had to make a journey of six hundred and fifty Turkish "agatchs," which are equal to about two thousand eight hundred kilometres, or to reckon by the Ottoman league—that is to say, the distance which a horse will ordinarily walk in an hour—the tour embraced a distance of seven hundred leagues, twenty-five to a degree. Now, from the 17th of August to the 30th of September, there are forty-five days; so Kéraban must make fifteen leagues in four-and-twenty hours, if he wished to return by the 30th of September, the last day on which the marriage of Amasia could take place if the conditions of the will

respecting the hundred thousand pounds of her aunt must be fulfilled. In any case, Kéraban and his guest would not be able to sit down at his table in Scutari, and eat the dinner there awaiting them, in less than forty-five days.

Nevertheless, by taking advantage of the several railway lines, the journey and the time could have been very considerably abridged. Thus, from Constantinople the railway may be traversed to Adrianople, and a branch thence to Janboli. The Varna and Rutschuck line unites with the Roumanian railways, and these extend to southern Russia by Jassi, Kisscheneff, Kharkow, Taganrog, and so on up to the Caucasus. A line from Tiflis to Poti runs to the Black Sea shore, and reaches almost to the Russian frontier. Certainly there is no railway across Turkey in Asia nearer than Broussa, but thence Scutari may be reached by the iron road.

But to argue on the above lines with Seigneur Kéraban, would have been so much time wasted. That he—one of the Old Turks—would condescend to make use of these modern appliances of locomotion, he, who for forty years had resisted all European encroachments! The idea was preposterous! Never! He would rather walk every step of the way than cede the point!

So that same evening, when Van Mitten and the merchant had reached the office of the latter at Galata, the question had been already raised and settled. The Dutchman's first suggestion respecting railroads was received with a shrug of the shoulders, and finally with a point-blank refusal, by Kéraban.

"Nevertheless," continued Van Mitten, who thought it right to insist, though without any hope of persuading his host, "nevertheless, it seems to me—"

"When I say 'No,'" interrupted Kéraban, "I mean 'No.' Besides, you are my guest; I have to take care of you, and you cannot proceed without me," he added.

"So be it," answered Van Mitten. "But putting railways aside, perhaps there are some simple means whereby we may reach Scutari without crossing the Bosphorus, but still without going all round the Black Sea."

"What are they?" inquired Kéraban, frowning. "If they are good, I will adopt them; if bad, I decline."

"I know an excellent way," said Van Mitten.

"Speak quickly. We have to make all our preparations yet. We have not a minute to lose!"

"This is my idea," said Van Mitten. "Let us go to one of the nearest ports and cross to Scutari by steamer."

"By steamer! Use a steamboat!" exclaimed Kéraban, raised to "boiling point" at once by the very mention of steam.

"Very well, then, by a sailing vessel, a zebec, a felucca, a skiff—anything you please: starting from one of the Anatolian ports, Kirpih, for instance. Thence we could reach Scutari in a day, and drink the health of the Muchir on our arrival!"

Seigneur Kéraban had permitted his friend to continue without interruption. Perhaps he was already inclined to adopt Van Mitten's suggestion, which promised a solution of the difficulty, and at the same time saved his own pride and *amour propre*. But after a while his eyes kindled, his fingers clenched and unclenched, and at length his fists, tightly closed, indicated a by no means reassuring temper to Nizib, who knew the signs.

"So, Van Mitten, you counsel me to embark upon the Black Sea to avoid crossing the Bosphorus? That is what your suggestion comes to."

"That would be the best plan, I think," replied Van Mitten.

"Have you ever heard any mention of a certain malady called sea-sickness?" inquired Kéraban quickly.

"Of course I have," replied the Dutchman.

"And you have never experienced it?"

"Never. Besides, the transit is such a short one—"

"So short!" exclaimed Kéraban. "And may I inquire what you call 'so short?'"

"Scarcely sixty leagues, I imagine."

"Well, it does not matter whether it be only fifty, or twenty, or ten, or only five," exclaimed Kéraban, who always became excited when contradicted or opposed. "If it were only two leagues, they would be too long for me!"

"But just think for a moment—"

"Do you know the Bosphorus?"

"Yes."

"There is scarce half a league of water between here and Scutari?"

"I believe so."

"Well then, whenever there is the least wind, I am always ill when crossing in my calque."

"Sea-sick?" inquired Van Mitten.

"I should be equally upset on a pond or in a bath. So now speak to me again about crossing the Black Sea, if you dare. Just dare to suggest to me any transit by sailing vessel again! try it!"

We need scarcely add that the worthy Dutchman did not discuss the question farther, and the suggestion dropped.

But how should they proceed? Communications were not easily made—at least in Turkey; but they are not impossible. On the ordinary routes relays could be found, and the travellers could journey on horseback, with provisions and supplies and with a guide—at least they could put themselves under the care of the Tartar courier who is charged with the postal service. But as the courier has only a limited time to proceed from one station to another, to follow him would induce too much fatigue; and to those unaccustomed to such rapid travelling, riding "post haste" was out of the question.

In any case the Seigneur Kéraban did not intend to travel in this manner. He would proceed rapidly, but comfortably. It was merely a question of expense, and that would have no weight with the rich merchant of Galata.

"Well," said Van Mitten in a resigned tone, "since we can't travel by railway, steamboat or sailing vessel, how do you propose that we *shall* proceed?"

"By post-chaise."

"With your own horses?"

"With relays."

"And do you expect to find relays all along the route?"

"Yes, I do."

"They will be very expensive!"

"What it will cost, it *will* cost," replied Kéraban, who again began to feel ruffled.

"You won't get out of this journey under a thousand pounds (Turkish)—perhaps fifteen hundred pounds,"¹ said Van Mitten.

"Be it so! I will spend millions, I tell you: *millions* if necessary. Now have you come to the end of your objections?"

"Yes," replied the Dutchman.

"And time too," said Kéraban, in a tone which suggested to Van Mitten the propriety of holding his tongue.

Nevertheless, he could not refrain from remarking to his imperious host that the journey would be attended with great expense; that he himself was expecting large remittances from Holland, which he intended to place in the bank at Constantinople; that, in fact, he had not much money with him; and—

Herc Kéraban put his hand upon his friend's mouth, and informed him that the expenses of the journey concerned him (Kéraban) and him only; that Van Mitten was his guest; and that it was his custom to pay his guests' expenses, &c., &c.

At the "&c.s" the Dutchman gave in, and no more was said on that point.

Had Kéraban not been the fortunate possessor of an old English-built carriage, he would have been driven to the necessity of hiring a Turkish "araba" drawn by oxen. But the old post-chaise which had made the journey from Rotterdam was there in the stable and quite ready for use.

This chaise was comfortably arranged for three travellers. In front a great box of provisions and luggage was secured, and behind a seat was carried up in the form of a hooded "rumble," in which two servants could travel comfortably. There was no coachman's "box," so the journey must be accomplished by post-horses.

It no doubt appeared ridiculous to modern connoisseurs, but the vehicle was well built, hung on good springs, had

¹ The Turkish pound is a gold coin equal to 2 paras, 25 cents; about 100 piastres.

large wheels, and was capable of defying the roughest roads.

Van Mitten and Kéraban occupied the interior of the chaise; Bruno and Nizib were perched up behind in the "cabriolet," which afforded them shelter, and was furnished with glasses which they could pull up at pleasure. Under such circumstances they felt equal to the journey to China, but fortunately the Black Sea did not extend so far, or Van Mitten would have been introduced to the "celestial" capital. Preparations for the journey were at once commenced, and if Kéraban could not start that very evening, as in the heat of the discussion he said he would do, he determined to leave the city at dawn next morning.

One night is not too long a period to make arrangements for such an expedition, and to put business matters in train. So the *employés* at the counting-house were "requisitioned" just as they were about to refresh themselves after a long day's fast. And Nizib was there, invaluable on all such occasions.

As for Bruno, he had to return to the Hotel de Pesth, Grande Rue de Pera, where his master and he had arrived that very morning, and arrange for the transfer of their luggage to the business premises of Kéraban. The faithful Dutchman was accompanied by his master, for he would not have dared to leave him.

"So, sir, it is all decided," he said, as soon as he and Van Mitten had quitted the merchant's house.

"How can it be otherwise with such a man as Kéraban?" said Van Mitten.

"And we are going all round the Black Sea?"

"Yes; unless my friend alters his course, which is almost an impossible contingency."

"I never thought we should ever find such a pig-headed Mussulman as he is," remarked Bruno.

"Your comparison, if not polite, is nevertheless correct," replied his master; "so, as I have hurt my hand in trying to hammer sense into him, I will abstain from attempting it in future."

"I was hoping to rest a little in Constantinople," said Bruno. "This journey and I—"

"This is not a journey, Bruno ; it is simply 'another way' that Kéraban is taking me home to dine with him!"

But this way of looking at things did not suit Bruno. He did not like moving ; and here he was destined to be travelling about for weeks—perhaps months—across various countries ; interesting, no doubt, but difficult and dangerous. Besides, the fatigue consequent upon such a journey would reduce him considerably in size and weight, and he would lose some of those hundred and sixty-seven pounds which he valued so highly.

Then his lamentable refrain came to his master's ears over and over again,—

"Something will happen to you, sir ; something evil will come of it, I tell you."

"We shall see in good time," replied the Dutchman. "Meanwhile collect our luggage, while I go and purchase a 'Guide' of the countries, and a note-book to record our impressions. Then you can return here and go to bed—or rest yourself."

"When?"

"When we have made the tour of the Black Sea, for it is fated we must make it."

With this fatalism, which a Mussulman need not have been ashamed of, Bruno shook his head and departed. The journey certainly did not commend itself to him.

Two hours later, Bruno came back with the baggage carried by stout porters. These were the natives whom Théophile Gautier called "two-footed camels without humps."

The "gibbosity," however, was not wanting in this instance, for the men carried heavy packs or trunks on their backs. These were deposited in the court-yard, and the chaise was loaded.

Meantime Kéraban was putting his affairs in order, and giving instructions to his clerks and managers. He wrote some letters, and drew a large sum in gold, as paper money was depreciated. He required Russian money, too, and he proposed to change his Ottoman gold at the *caisse* of his friend Selim, the banker, at Odessa.

The preparations were rapidly completed. Provisions were packed, and some defensive weapons deposited in the chaise, in readiness for an emergency. Kéraban had not forgotten two narghilés, for Van Mitten and himself, an article quite indispensable to a Turk, and particularly for a tobacco-merchant.

The horses had been ordered to arrive at daybreak. From midnight to sunrise there was time for supper and some sleep. Next morning, when Seigneur Kéraban sent to call the rest of the party, they jumped up and dressed in their travelling costumes.

The chaise was ready ; the horses harnessed ; the postilion mounted ; he was waiting for the travellers.

Seigneur Kéraban repeated his instructions to his men. All were ready to start.

Van Mitten, Bruno, and Nizib waited, silent, in the yard.

"So you have really determined?" whispered Van Mitten to his friend Kéraban.

The latter merely pointed to the chaise, but made no verbal reply.

Van Mitten bowed and gravely entered the carriage taking the left-hand seat, Kéraban entered after him: Nizib and Bruno climbed up into the "cabrolet" at the back.

"Ah, my letter!" exclaimed Kéraban, just as the postilion was starting his horses.

Then, letting down the window, he handed a letter to one of his clerks, with directions to put it in the post.

This letter was addressed to his housekeeper at his villa at Scutari, and contained only these words:—

"Dinner put off until my return. Change the *menu*. Soup *au lait caillé*, shoulder of mutton *aux épices*. Be sure it is not over-done."

Then the chaise rolled away through the streets, crossed the Golden Horn on the bridge of Validèh Sultane, and quitted the town by Jené Kapoussi, the New-gate.

Seigneur Kéraban has gone! May Allah protect him!

CHAPTER VI.

SHOWING HOW THE TRAVELLERS ENCOUNTERED SOME DIFFICULTIES, CHIEFLY IN THE DELTA OF THE DANUBE.

FROM an administrative point of view, Turkey in Europe is divided into "vilayets" (governments or departments), administered by a "vali" (governor-general)—a sort of prefect nominated by the Sultan. These "vilayets" are subdivided into "sanjaks" or districts governed by a "moustesarif," into "kazas" or cantons administered by a "caïmacan," and "nahaies" or communes, with a "moudir" or mayor. This, as will be perceived, is something like the French system of administration.

But, as a matter of fact, Kéraban had few if any points of contact with the authorities of the "vilayets" of Roumelia, which cuts the route from Constantinople to the frontier. This route keeps, as nearly as possible, to the shores of the Black Sea, and shortened the journey he had to make.

The weather was very pleasant for travelling. The heat was tempered by a refreshing breeze from the sea, which came in an uninterrupted course across the somewhat flat country. First the fields of maize, barley, and rye, with vineyards, which are widely cultivated in the Ottoman empire, met the eye. Then came forests of oaks, pines, beech, birch; then clusters here and there of plantains, Judas-tree, laurels, figs, St. John's bread-tree, and, particularly near the sea, pomegranates and olives identical with those of the same latitude of lower Europe.

Leaving the gate of Jeni, the carriage took the road to Choumla, whence a branch-road leads to Adrianople by way of Kirk-Kilisie. This road follows, and many times crosses, the railway which puts Adrianople, the second capital of the Ottoman empire, in communication with Constantinople.

As the carriage was being driven rapidly alongside the railway, the train overtook the travellers, and a man put his head out of a railway carriage to have a look at the chaise, which was proceeding at a great pace.

This traveller was no other than the Maltese captain, Yarhud, who was on his way to Odessa, where, thanks to the speed of the train, he would arrive long before the uncle of young Ahmet.

Van Mitten could not resist his impulse to call the attention of his companion to the train, which sped past them at a high speed. Kéraban merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Eh, friend Kéraban, they get to their destination very quickly," said Van Mitten.

"Yes, when they *do* arrive at it," replied Kéraban.

Not an hour was lost in this the first day of the expedition. As money in plenty was forthcoming, there were no delays in procuring horses: the animals were quite as willing as the postillions to work for a master who paid so handsomely.

The travellers passed Tchataldje, by Buyuk Khan, by the watershed of the tributaries of the Sea of Marmora, by the valley of Tchorloxa, by the village of Yeni Keni; then by the valley of Galata, across which, if the legend be true, are dug subterranean canals which used to supply the capital with water.

At nightfall the carriage stopped, but only for an hour, at the long, straggling village of Serai. As the provisions the travellers carried with them were more particularly destined for consumption in the localities where it would be difficult to procure food even of inferior quality, it was decided to keep the store in reserve. So Kéraban and his companions dined at Seraï, and the journey was then resumed.

Bruno, we may venture to say, found it somewhat unpleasant to pass the night in the "dicky" of the carriage, but Nizib had no such feelings, and accepted the situation as a matter of course. He slept soundly, and set his companion such a good example that he could not do otherwise than profit by it.

The night passed without incident, thanks to the long and winding road which formed the approach to the town of Viga, and avoided the rude slopes and marshy ground of the valley. Van Mitten much regretted that he could not see that little town, which contains about a thousand people, almost all Greeks, and which is the seat of a bishop. But he had not come to *see*. He was the companion of the inflexible Kéran, who did not trouble himself to collect any impressions of his journey.

About five o'clock the next evening, after having passed the villages of Bounar-Hissan, Jena, and Uskùp, the travellers threaded a little wood wherein were several tombs. In the graves underneath lay the remains of the victims of a band of brigands who had at one time infested the neighbourhood. The travellers then reached a fair-sized town containing about 16,000 inhabitants, called Kirk-Kilisse. This name, which signifies "Forty Churches," is justified by the number of religious edifices. It is situated in a valley, the sides and bottom of which are occupied by houses, and which Van Mitten and his valet explored in a few hours. The carriage was put up in the court-yard of a respectable hotel, where Seigneur Kéran and his companions passed the night, and started again at daybreak.

During the day (19th of August) the postillion cleared the village of Karabounar, and in the evening, late, arrived at Bourgaz, which is situated on the gulf of that name. The travellers slept that evening in a "khan," or kind of rude inn, which certainly was not so comfortable as the post-chaise.

Next morning they found the road parted with the coast, and ran inland towards Aïdos; in the evening the party arrived at Paravadi, one of the stations of the little railway from Choumla to Varna. They then traversed the province of Bulgaria, to the southern extremity of the Dobroucha, at the foot of the last spurs of the Balkan chain.

At this point the difficulties became serious: there were so many swampy valleys, so many forests of aquatic plants to be passed, through which it was almost impossible for the chaise to make way, and where its progress disturbed from their retreats thousands of wild fowl. The Balkans form

a very important mountain chain. In its range between Bulgaria and Roumelia it detaches many spurs northward, which extend in undulations almost to the Danube.

Hereabouts Kéraban's patience was sorely tried.

When it became necessary to cross the extremity of the chain before descending into the Dobroutcha the tremendously steep slopes and awkward corners rendered it quite impossible to drive the carriage round. So the horses had to be unharnessed several times in these narrow roads only suitable for horses alone, and all these arrangements took up a great deal of time, and gave rise to considerable ill-temper and much recrimination. When the horses were taken out, the carriage-wheels had to be blocked and lifted round, and above all "greased" with a considerable handful of piastres, which the postillions put into their pockets, declaring all the time that they must retrace their steps.

Kéraban had good ground for inveighing against the existing government which permitted the roads to get so greatly out of repair, and which did so little to facilitate travelling in the provinces. The "divan" would not put itself out, except to impose taxes and restrictions of all kinds. Seigneur Kéraban knew all about it! Ten paras to cross the Bosphorus indeed! He always harked back to this fixed idea, which continually oppressed him. Ten paras : ten paras, forsooth!

Van Mitten took very good care not to answer Kéraban. The very suspicion of contradiction would have enraged his inflexible companion. So Van Mitten, by way of appeasing his friend, found fault with all governments, and the Turkish administration in particular.

"But it is not possible that there could be such abuses in Holland!" exclaimed Kéraban.

"On the contrary, there are," my friend," replied Van Mitten, who was desirous to appease his companion at any cost.

"I tell you there are not," retorted the latter. "It is only in Constantinople that such things are possible. Do you mean to tell me that they would put a tax upon calques at Rotterdam?"



The tremendously steep slopes and awkward corners.

"We have no calques there," replied Van Mitten.

"That is no matter."

"No matter—what do you mean?"

"Well, supposing you had them there, your king would never venture to tax them. Now don't tell me that this new-fangled Turkish government is not the very worst in the world."

"The worst! not a doubt of it," responded Van Mitten, who was anxious to bring the discussion to a close.

And so, the better to put an end to what after all was a mere conversation, he took out his long Dutch pipe, and the appearance of the pipe made Kéraban anxious to stupefy himself also with the fumes of his *narghilé*. The carriage was quickly filled with tobacco smoke, and the glasses had to be let down to permit it to escape. So, by degrees and under the influence of the weed, the obstinate one became silent and even calm, until some trivial incident aroused him to the realities of the journey.

It became necessary, in the absence of shelter, to pass the night of the 20th of August in the carriage; and it was only when morning dawned that the last spurs of the Balkans were crossed, and the travellers found themselves beyond the Roumanian frontier in the more suitable roads of the Dobroutcha.

This region is almost a peninsula, formed by a great bend of the Danube, which, after turning northwards towards Galatz, bends to the east again towards the Black Sea, into which it discharges itself by many mouths. Indeed, the isthmus, so to speak, which unites the "peninsula" to the Balkans, is circumscribed by the portion of the province situated between Tchernavoda and Kustendjé, which are connected by railway. But south of the railroad, the country being essentially the same as the northern portion, topographically speaking, one may say that the plains of the Dobroutcha have their birth at the base of the last hills of the Balkan chain.

"The good country," the Turks call this fertile tract wherein the land belongs to the first occupant. It is, if not inhabited, at any rate traversed by Tartar shepherds, and populated by Valaques in the portions near the river. The

Ottoman empire owns a considerable portion of this land, which exhibits a succession of plateaux, scarcely intersected by any valleys, which extend almost to the forests by the mouths of the Danube. Upon the even roads the chaise proceeded rapidly. The post-masters had no occasion to grumble here when their horses were harnessed, or if they did, it was only to keep themselves in practice.

Their progress was rapid, so fast indeed, that on the 21st of August the travellers "changed" at Koslidcha and the same evening reached Bazardjik.

At the latter place Kéraban determined to pass the night, and let every member of the party enjoy a good rest, of which Bruno was greatly in need, though he prudently kept his opinion to himself on this subject.

At daylight next morning the travellers proceeded with fresh horses in the direction of Lake Karasou, an immense shaft or reservoir, the waters of which pour themselves into the Danube in dry seasons when the river is low. About twenty-four leagues were accomplished in twelve hours, and at eight o'clock in the evening the carriage stopped at the station of Medjidie on the Kustendjé and Tchernavoda Railway. This town is quite a new one, but it already boasts of twenty thousand inhabitants, and promises to become more important.

At this station the travellers were obliged to wait till the line was clear, greatly to Kéraban's disgust, who was in a hurry to reach the khan in which he proposed to pass the night. But a train was on the line, and fifteen minutes elapsed before it proceeded. A torrent of invective was accordingly poured forth upon railway administration in general, which permitted all kinds of ill-doing, and not only smashed those travellers who were foolish enough to travel in the carriages, but hindered others who objected to use the railway.

"At any rate," said Kéraban to Van Mitten, "an accident will never happen to me in a train."

"Who knows?" returned the Dutchman somewhat imprudently.

"I know it!" replied Kéraban in a tone which brought the conversation to an abrupt conclusion.

At length the train moved away from the station ; the gates were opened, and the carriage was permitted to pass. The travellers then reached the khan, where they were enabled to lodge comfortably in the place which was named after the Sultan Abdul Medjid.

Next day they crossed a desert to Babadagh, but so slowly was the journey made that it was deemed advisable to continue it through the night. In the evening, about five o'clock, Toultscha was reached. This is one of the most important towns in Moldavia, and in such a city, containing representatives from nearly every country under heaven, Kéraban had no difficulty in selecting a suitable hotel. Van Mitten also had time to explore the town and the amphitheatre, which is very picturesquely situated.

On the next day, the 24th of August, the travellers crossed the Danube, and it need scarcely be said that the origin of the name of the river was the subject of a lively discussion between Kéraban and Van Mitten, who argued from the Ister or Hister of the Greeks to the Roman name Danuvius, which in Thracian language signified "cloudy." They argued from Celtic, Sanscrit, Greek, and whether Professor Windishman was wrong or Professor Bopp was right, till Kéraban as usual reduced his adversary to silence by saying that Danube came from the Zend word "asdanu," which means the "Rapid River."

But rapid as it may be, its course is not sufficiently quick to carry away all its waters ; and consequently inundations of the Danube have to be calculated on. Now Kéraban in his obstinacy did not make any allowances for this, and, notwithstanding all remonstrances, persisted in crossing the delta of the Danube.

He was not alone in this determination—that is, hundreds of aquatic birds were also crossing ; but he ought to have recognized the fact that, if nature had made these residents web-footed, it was because they would have to inhabit a swampy region liable to inundations.

The horses and the carriage were, however, quite unfitted for such a transit ; and the route was practically through a marsh which was almost impassable. Notwithstanding the advice of the postillion, and Van Mitten's remonstrances,

Kéraban gave the order to go on. So the men obeyed him. The consequence was that towards evening the carriage became embedded in the slough, and the horses were quite unable to extricate it.

"The roads are not properly attended to in this country," said Van Mitten.

"They are as they are," replied Kéraban, "and just what you might expect under such a government!"

"We should do better if we retraced our steps and endeavoured to find another way," said Van Mitten.

"On the contrary—we shall do better by continuing our journey and not changing our route at all."

"But how are we to get on—?"

"Get on? By sending for some more horses to the nearest village. It makes little difference whether we sleep in the carriage or in an inn, does it?"

There was nothing to be said to such an argument as this. The postillion and Nizib were despatched for extra horses to the next village, which was not so very far away. They could not be expected to return, however, much before sunrise. So Kéraban, Van Mitten, and Bruno had to reconcile themselves to the fact of passing the night in that vast plain, as desolate a "steppe" as the deserts of Central Australia. Fortunately the carriage, already embedded to the axles, gave no signs of sinking any deeper in the quagmire.

The night was very dark. Great clouds came down very near the earth, chased by the winds from the Black Sea. Though there was no actual rain, a thick mist from the saturated ground arose like an Arctic fog. Nothing could be seen at a greater distance than ten paces, and the lamps of the carriage threw only a perplexing gleam through the mist, so that it would have been better, perhaps, to have extinguished them. It was possible that the light might attract some undesirable visitor; but when Van Mitten said so, the obstinate Kéraban argued the point to such a length that it was quite lost. The Dutchman was right nevertheless, and had he been sharp enough to suggest their being left lighted, Kéraban would no doubt have had them extinguished.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE HORSES OF THE CHAISE DO FROM
FEAR WHAT THEY WOULD NOT DO FOR THE WHIP.

TEN o'clock came. Kéraban, Van Mitten, and Bruno, after a light supper which consisted of some of the stores in the hampers, walked about smoking for nearly half an hour, pacing up and down a narrow path which was firm enough to sustain them.

"Now," said Van Mitten, "I think, friend Kéraban, that there is no objection to our going to sleep in the carriage until the fresh horses come."

"I see no objection whatever," replied Kéraban, after a pause. This reply was somewhat extraordinary for a man who was always making objections.

"I do not think we have anything to fear in the middle of such an extensive plain," said the Dutchman.

"I think not."

"There is no attack likely to be made upon us?"

"None."

"Except, perhaps, the attacks of mosquitos," said Bruno, who had just succeeded in administering to himself a hard slap on the face, intended as a death-blow to half-a-dozen of those insects.

As a matter of fact, the worries of these insects became very trying. Attracted, perhaps, by the light of the carriage lamps, the mosquitos came singing in myriads around them.

"Hum," said Van Mitten, "there is one thing needful, and that is a mosquito-net."

"These are not mosquitos," said Kéraban, as he scratched the back of his neck, "they are gnats."

"I'll be hanged if I can tell the difference, then," remarked Van Mitten, who did not wish to enter upon an entomological discussion.

"It is a very curious thing," remarked Kéraban, "that only the female insect attacks man."

"I think I can understand that," remarked Bruno, rubbing himself.

"I believe we should do well to get into the chaise," said Van Mitten; "we shall be devoured if we remain here."

"The countries of the Lower Danube are particularly plagued with these gnats, and one ought to sprinkle one's bed and clothing with powder of pyrites."

"Of which we have not a grain," remarked Van Mitten.

"Precisely," answered Kéraban. "But who could have foreseen that we should have been stranded in the marshes of the Dobroutcha?"

"No one, friend Kéraban."

"I have heard it stated," continued Kéraban, "that a colony of Crimean Tartars, to whom the government had made a concession in this delta, was obliged to be broken up in consequence of the attacks of these gnats."

"After our own experience, the tale does not seem improbable," replied Van Mitten.

"Let us get into the carriage again," said Kéraban.

"We have remained out too long already," said his friend, as the mosquitos came buzzing round in myriads, beating their tiny wings thousands of times in a second.

Just as Kéraban and his friend were about to enter the chaise, the former said,—

"As we have nothing to fear, had not Bruno better remain outside and wait the return of the postillion?"

"He will not object," said Van Mitten.

"I will not object because it is my duty to obey," replied Bruno. "But I shall be eaten alive."

"No," replied Kéraban. "I am informed that these gnats never bite twice in the same place; so that Bruno will soon be free from their attacks."

"Yes, when I have been bitten in a million places," said Bruno.

"That is what I mean," retorted Kéraban.

"But may I not, at any rate, keep watch in the 'dicky'?" asked Bruno.

"Certainly, so long as you do not go to sleep there."

"And how is it possible for me to sleep in the middle of this swarm of mosquitos?"

"Gnats," replied Kéraban; "merely gnats. Don't forget that, Bruno."

So saying, Kéraban and Van Mitten shut themselves up in the carriage, while Bruno climbed into the "dicky," to keep watch over his master, or masters; for since Kéraban and Van Mitten had met, Bruno could certainly count upon two masters.

Bruno, having carefully closed the carriage doors, went to see how the horses fared. The poor brutes, quite exhausted, lay prone upon the ground, breathing loudly, and mingling their hot breath with the fogs of the swamps.

"Old Nick himself will not drag them from this quagmire," muttered Bruno. "Seigneur Kéraban must have had some fine ideas concerning this route; but after all that is his business."

Then the valet ascended to his perch, and let down the glasses, through which he could see the luminous bars projected by the carriage lamps through the mist.

What better could Bruno do to keep himself awake and his eyes open than endeavour to review all the circumstances which had carried him in the train of the inflexible Kéraban, the most pig-headed of all Turks?

So he (Bruno), a native of ancient Batavia, a "loafer" in the streets and on the quays of Rotterdam, a fisherman of very slight pretence, a loungeur by the canals which intersected his native town, had been carried away to the opposite end of Europe. He had made an enormous stride from Holland to Turkey. Scarcely disembarked in Constantinople, when fate dragged him to the steppes of the lower Danube. And there he was, perched up in the carriage, in the "dicky" of a post-chaise in the midst of the marshes of the Dobroutcha, lost in the darkness of night, and fixed in the ground as firmly as the Gothic tower of Zuidekirk. And all this because he had undertaken to obey his master, who, without any necessity, had yielded to Kéraban!

"Oh, for the strangeness of human experience!" muttered Bruno. "Here I am, in a fair way to make the tour of the Black Sea—if we ever *do* make it—all to save ten paras, which I would willingly have paid out of my own pocket! Ah! this headstrong fellow will ruin me: I have already lost two pounds weight, and in four days! How much shall I have lost in four weeks? Oh, hang these insects!"

Though Bruno had carefully closed the "cabriolet," some dozens of gnats had found their way in, and were feasting on him. So he rubbed, and slapped, and scratched, but so that Kéraban should not hear him.

An hour passed; then another. Perhaps Bruno might have slept, had not the mosquitos prevented any repose. But sleep under the circumstances was impossible.

It was nearly midnight when a brilliant idea occurred to Bruno: he would smoke, and so overcome the persistent attacks of the gnats with the puffs of tobacco. How did it happen he had not thought of it before? If the insects could live in such an atmosphere as he designed to create, they must be very hard to kill—these mosquitos of the Danube.

So he drew his porcelain pipe—a sister of that which had been taken from him in Constantinople—and began to discharge thick volumes of tobacco smoke upon his enemies. The swarm hummed louder than ever, but soon dispersed and sought refuge in obscure corners of the cabriolet.

Bruno congratulated himself upon his manœuvre. The battery which he had unmasked had routed his opponents, they had fled in disorder, but as he did not wish to make any prisoners—indeed, quite the contrary—he opened the glass and let the half-stupefied insects escape, knowing that the tobacco would effectually keep the others at bay.

So, having gained the victory, Bruno paused to look around him over the field. The night was very dark, and strong gusts of wind came tearing over the flats. Had not the carriage been so firmly embedded in the ground, it might have been overturned. But there was no fear of that.

Bruno stared northwards, endeavouring to distinguish some gleam of light which would indicate the approach of the postillion and Nizib with the horses. But the darkness

was profound beyond the small space illumined by the carriage lamps. Nevertheless, while straining his eyes into the darkness, Bruno fancied he perceived, about sixty yards from his perch, some brilliant points of light, which moved about rapidly, and appeared sometimes on the ground, and sometimes about two or three feet above it.

The valet at first thought that the spots were the effects of "will-o'-the-wisp" or *ignis fatuus*, caused by the escape of gases from the marshy ground. But even if his reason led him into error, the horses would not have been conscious of the phenomenon, and they began to evince symptoms of uneasiness, and snorted loudly.

"Ah! what can this be?" said Bruno to himself. "Some new complication, no doubt. Perhaps they may be wolves yonder!" This surmise was in no way extravagant; for these hungry animals are very numerous in the delta of the Danube, and they had on this occasion no doubt been attracted by the smell of the horses.

"*Diable!*" muttered Bruno. "These are worse foes than mosquitos, or the gnats of our pig-headed friend. Tobacco will be no safeguard this time!"

Meanwhile the horses displayed great uneasiness which it was impossible not to understand. They attempted to struggle through the slough, and tried to rear, shaking the carriage violently at every attempt. The luminous points which had been observed were approaching. A kind of growling was audible, carried down by the wind to the travellers' ears.

"I think," said Bruno to himself, "that it is about time to rouse my master and Seigneur Kéraban."

The incident was sufficiently serious. Bruno slid down from his perch, let down the steps of the carriage, opened the door, and, having entered, closed it behind him. The two friends were sleeping soundly.

"Monsieur!" said Bruno, putting his hand on Van Mitten's shoulder, "Master!"

"Go to the Devil!" was the Dutchman's reply, as, half asleep, he regarded his servitor.

"There is no use sending people to the Devil when he is so close by," muttered Bruno.

"Who are you?" inquired Van Mitten.

"I? Your servant!"

"Ah, Bruno, is it you? After all you did right to wake me. I was dreaming that Madam Van Mitten—"

"You were seeking a quarrel," replied Bruno; "well, there is food for one now."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Will you please wake Seigneur Kéraban?"

"Must I wake him?"

"Yes, we have not too much time."

So Van Mitten, without another word, though still but half awake, shook his companion vigorously.

None can sleep more soundly than a Turk, when the Turk has a good digestion and an easy conscience. This was the case with Kéraban, and many attempts were made to rouse him.

Kéraban, without opening his eyes, grumbled and growled like a man who was by no means disposed to stir. Had he been as headstrong in his sleeping as when waking, they would have been obliged to let him alone.

Nevertheless, the persistence of Van Mitten and Bruno was such that Seigneur Kéraban was awakened. He extended his arms, opened his eyes, and in a thick, sleepy tone said, "Have the postillion and Nizib arrived with the relays?"

"Not yet," answered Van Mitten.

"Why did you wake me, then?"

"Because if the horses have not come," said Bruno, "some other animals of a very suspicious appearance are surrounding the carriage and preparing to attack us."

"What animals do you mean?"

"Look!" said Bruno briefly.

Kéraban let down the glass and leant out of the window.

"Allah protect us!" he exclaimed. "There is a pack of wild boars."

He was right. The assailants were wild boars, which are very numerous in the Danubian territory which confines the estuary. The attacks of these animals are greatly dreaded, and they may be well classed amongst the wild beasts.

"What are we going to do?" asked the Dutchman.

"Remain quiet if they do not attack us," replied Kéraban.
"We will defend ourselves if they do."

"Why should they attack us?" asked Van Mitten.
"Wild boars, so far as I am aware, are not carnivorous animals."

"Quite so," replied Kéraban, "but if we do not run the risk of being eaten, we have the chance of being ripped up by their tusks."

"That's about it," said Bruno calmly.

"Therefore, let us make ready for any emergency," remarked Kéraban.

The travellers accordingly got their weapons ready. Van Mitten and Bruno had each a revolver carrying six shots; and a good supply of cartridges handy. The old Turk—a declared enemy of every modern invention—only carried two pistols of Ottoman make, with Damascus barrels, the butts ornamented with precious stones, but more suitable for ornament than defence. Van Mitten, Kéraban and Bruno had to content themselves with these arms, and determined to use them only when certain of success.

Meanwhile the wild boars, about twenty in number, were continually approaching and surrounding the carriage. By the light of the lamps, which had no doubt attracted them, the travellers could perceive the animals tossing up the earth with their tusks in their excitement. They were enormous specimens, almost as large as donkeys, of prodigious strength, and each quite capable of decimating, if not destroying, a whole pack of hounds. The situation of the travellers in the carriage would be by no means a pleasant one if they were attacked on both sides before daybreak.

The horses quite understood the position; and as the boars approached, the poor beasts plunged so that they seemed likely to break away from the traces altogether.

Just then some shots were heard. Van Mitten and Bruno had each fired twice at the boars which came to the attack. The animals, more or less seriously wounded, uttered terrible cries and gruntings as they rolled upon

the ground. But the rest, rendered more furious, precipitated themselves upon the carriage, and attacked it with their tusks. The panels were pierced in many places, and it became pretty clear that ere long they would be completely "stove in."

"Fire! fire!" exclaimed Kéraban, as he discharged his pistols. They generally missed fire once in every four times, which was quite in accordance with precedent. The revolvers of Bruno and Van Mitten, however, did good execution, and accounted for a number of the assailants, some of which were boldly attacking the horses.

The latter had no means of repelling the assailants save by kicking. If they had been free, they would have scampered over the plain, and then it would have been merely a question of speed between them and the boars. As it was, the horses did all in their power to break their traces and escape. But the harness was stout cord and refused to part. It was therefore a question whether the forepart of the carriage would give way, or the whole vehicle be pulled out of the mire.

Kéraban and his companions were quite alive to the situation. What they most feared was that the carriage would capsize. Under those circumstances, the boars which the bullets had not kept off would dart upon them. So they seemed quite at the mercy of the furious pack. Nevertheless the coolness of the three men never abandoned them, and they continued to fire upon the assailants.

At length a tremendous pull shook the chaise. They thought the front part had given way.

"All the better," said Kéraban. "The horses will gallop away across the plain, and the wild boars will pursue them; so we shall be left undisturbed."

But the forepart of the chaise resisted with a strength that did credit to its English builder. So, as it would not part, the whole chaise moved, and the shock became extremely violent; so much so, indeed, that the carriage was pulled from its oozy bed, and the horses, mad with terror, rushed at headlong speed across the marshy plain through the thick darkness of the night.

But the wild boars had by no means abandoned the party. They ran beside the carriage, and kept worrying the horses while they attacked the chaise, which could not distance them.

Seigneur Kéraban, Van Mitten, and Bruno were very soon thrown to the bottom of the carriage.

"Either we shall be overturned—" cried Van Mitten.

"Or we shall not," interrupted Kéraban.

"It would be better to seize the reins," said Bruno judiciously as, lowering the front windows of the chaise, he sought to grasp the "ribbons;" but the horses had in their struggle broken them, and the valet was obliged to abandon his attempts, and to allow the animals to continue their headlong course across the swampy ground. There were no means of stopping them, and if any had presented themselves, the boars would also have halted. So the three men had to depend upon their weapons.

Of the travellers, thrown against each other or into the corners of the carriage at every jolt of the conveyance, the one resigned as a true Mussulman ought to be, the others as phlegmatic as Dutchmen, never exchanged a remark.

Thus an hour passed away, and the chaise still was dragged along at the same furious pace; but the wild boars did not abandon the chase.

"Van Mitten, my friend," said Kéraban at length, "I can tell you how a traveller, under similar circumstances to these, when pursued by a pack of wolves in Russia, was saved by the sublime devotion of his servant."

"How was that?" inquired Van Mitten.

"In a very simple way," replied Kéraban. "The servant took an affectionate farewell of his master; then, recommending himself to Heaven, he threw himself out of the carriage; and while the wolves stopped to devour him, his master managed to distance them and was saved!"

"It is very unfortunate that Nizib is away just now," remarked Bruno dryly.

After this little speech the travellers relapsed into silence, and calmly waited events.

Night was now closing in, and still the horses did not

abate their desperate speed, so the wild boars could not gain upon them to make a serious attack. If no accident occurred,—if the wheels did not come off, or if a shock more than usually severe did not overturn the chaise,—the occupants considered they had a chance of safety, even tailing the devotion of which Bruno appeared incapable. Meanwhile the horses, directed by instinct, kept safely to the portion of the steppe which they had been accustomed to traverse. They proceeded in a direct line towards the post where relays were to be obtained.

Thus it happened that at daylight the travellers were not far from the much-needed assistance.

The pack of wild boars continued their course for about half an hour longer, and then by degrees fell away, but the horses did not slacken speed for a moment, nor did they halt until they fell, completely foundered, about a hundred paces from the post-house.

Kéraban and his companions were safe, and they all returned thanks to the Supreme Being, the God alike of the Christian and the Mussulman, for their preservation.

Just as the carriage came to a stop, Nizib and the postillion, who had not dared to trust themselves upon the steppe in the dark, were setting out with fresh horses. These were immediately harnessed in place of those which had been so knocked up. For this Kéraban had to pay a large sum; then, without an hour's rest, the chaise, which had been overhauled and attended to, continued the journey, and took the road to Kilia, a small town situated on the Danube.

The travellers reached Kilia without further adventure upon the evening of the 25th of August. There they alighted at the principal hotel and had twelve hours' repose, which in a great measure compensated them for the fatigue they had undergone. Next day they started at daybreak, and soon reached the Russian frontier.

There they encountered new difficulties. The formalities of the customs' officers exasperated Kéraban, who, fortunately or unfortunately, knew enough of their language to make himself understood, and for a time his obstinacy threatened to prevent the continuation of the journey.

At length, however, Van Mitten succeeded in calming him, and Kéraban consented to submit to the exigences of the service and to have his baggage examined. He paid the duties demanded, and consoled himself by repeating the sage remark that "All governments were alike, and he did not estimate any of them at the value of a melon-rind!"

The Roumanian frontier was crossed, and the chaise traversed that portion of Bessarabia which forms the littoral of the Black Sea towards the north-west. Then the travellers were not more than twenty leagues from Odessa.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL BE PLEASED TO BECOME
ACQUAINTED WITH THE FAIR AMASIA, AND HER
INTENDED HUSBAND AHMET.

AMASIA, the only daughter of Selim the banker, was walking and chatting with her personal attendant Nedjeb, in the verandah of a beautiful country-house, the gardens of which extended in terraces to the shore of the Black Sea.

From the last terrace, the steps of which were bathed by the calm water, Odessa could be perceived towards the South in all its glory. This town is quite an oasis in the surrounding desert, forming a splendid panorama of palaces, churches, hotels, and other habitations built upon a steep cliff which rises precipitously from the sea. From the banker's house one could even perceive the great square surrounded with trees, and the staircase which marks the statue of Richelieu. This great man was the founder of the city, and was its ruler until he undertook the liberation of France.

As the climate is dry and "trying" in the season of the northerly and easterly winds, the inhabitants seek shelter during the summer heat under the welcome shade of the Khontors, and the residents have built their villas on the sea-shore; for business will not permit them all to seek relaxation in the Southern Crimea for the whole season. Amongst these elegant houses one would remark the banker's residence, which was so situated as to be not much inconvenienced by the prevailing dryness of the season.

The name "Odessa" signifies the "town of Ulysses," for so the inhabitants formerly petitioned Catharine II. to name their village. The empress consulted the Academy of St. Petersburg, and the *savants* investigated the records of the siege of Troy. These records informed them that

at one time a town, more or less problematical, existed there under the name of "Odyssos," whence Odessa arose in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Odessa has been, is, and always will be, a commercial city. Its 500,000 inhabitants consist of Russians, Turks, Greeks, and Armenians—in fact a gathering together of all people who have business tastes. Now, if commerce makes merchants, it equally makes bankers; and amongst the latter, Selim, from modest beginnings, had risen to be one of the most wealthy and esteemed.

Selim belonged to the rather numerous class of monogamous Turks. He had never had but one wife: Amasia was his only daughter, now engaged to Ahmet, Kéraban's nephew. So Selim was the correspondent and intimate friend of the most obstinate Turk who ever wore a turban. The marriage of Amasia and Ahmet was to be celebrated at Odessa. She would be the sole wife of the young man, and return with him to his uncle's house in Constantinople.

People also knew that Amasia's aunt—her father's sister—had left by will to her niece an enormous sum of money, amounting to 100,000*l.* (Turkish), on the condition that she should marry before she was sixteen—a caprice of the old lady, who, never having been herself married, was determined that Amasia should lose no time—and the period fixed would expire in six weeks from the time we refer to. Failing this marriage, the money would go to collateral inheritors.

Amasia herself was charming even in the eyes of Europeans. Had her white muslin veil, her gold-embroidered head-dress, and the triple row of sequins across her forehead been removed, her beautiful hair would have been perceived in all its luxuriance. She was in no way indebted to art to heighten her beauty. No *hanum* pencilled her eye-brows, no kohl blackened her lashes, no henna darkened the eyelids. No bismuth or "rouge" improved her complexion: no carmine heightened the colour of her lips. A western woman of the present style would be found more painted than was Amasia. The elegance of her figure, her graceful mode of walking, and

her natural ease of movement, were all discernible under the *feredjé*, or cashmere cloak which draped her from neck to heels like a dalmatica.

That day, in the gallery which opened into the gardens, Amasia was wearing a long silken chemise, which was concealed by the ample *chalwar* united to a little embroidered vest, and an *entari* with a silken train slashed on the sleeves, and embroidered with a trimming of *oya*—a Turkish lace. A girdle of cashmere supported the train, so that it might not impede her steps. A pair of earrings and a ring were her only jewels. Elegant *padjoub*s of velvet hid the lower part of the leg, and her pretty little feet were encased in gold-embroidered slippers.

Her attendant, Nedjeb, a bright and lively girl and a devoted servant—one might say friend—was at this time with Amasia; laughing, chattering, moving hither and thither, and making the house quite gay by her good-humour and cheerfulness. Nedjeb was a Zingara by descent, not a slave. Slavery is not the less abolished in principle because one occasionally sees some Ethiopians or negroes sold in the open market. A large number of domestics is necessary for a great Turkish family—a number which in Constantinople includes a third of the Mussulman population—these servants are never reduced to a condition of slavery: and it must be confessed that, looking to the fact that each domestic has his special work, there is not much to do individually.

The banker's establishment was conducted somewhat on this principle, but Nedjeb was exclusively attached to Amasia. Having been received quite as a child into the house, she occupied a unique position, and never performed any menial duty. Amasia was reclining upon a divan, covered with rich Persian stuffs, and was gazing out upon the Bay of Odessa.

"Dear mistress," said Nedjeb, seating herself upon a cushion at Amasia's feet, "Seigneur Ahmet has not yet arrived! What is he about, I wonder?"

"He has gone into the city," replied Amasia, "and perhaps he will bring back a letter from his uncle Kéraban."

"A letter!" exclaimed the attendant. "A letter! We don't want that; we want Seigneur Kéraban himself; and, to tell the truth, this uncle keeps us waiting a good deal."

"Patience, Nedjeb. A little patience," said Amasia.

"Yes, you speak very calmly and take it easily. But if you were in my place, my dear young mistress, you would scarcely be so patient."

"Silly girl!" replied Amasia. "It is not a question of your marriage, but mine."

"And do you not think it is a very important thing to pass from the service of a young lady to that of a rich married dame?"

"I shall not love you any the better," said Amasia.

"Nor could I love you any better, dear lady; but, truly, to see you so happy as the wife of Seigneur Ahmet would react on me, and make me very happy too."

"Dear Ahmet!" murmured Amasia, as she veiled her eyes a moment, while she invoked the remembrance of her *fiancé*.

"Ah! there you are, obliged to shut your eyes to see him," cried Nedjeb maliciously, "while if he were here you would open them."

"I tell you that he has gone to meet the messenger from the bank, who will no doubt have a letter from his uncle."

"Yes; a letter from Seigneur Kéraban, in which he will repeat as usual that business detains him in Constantinople; that he cannot as yet leave home; that tobacco is rising; that unless it falls he will arrive in eight days, without fail—unless indeed it happens to be sixteen days. And time presses. We have only six weeks. If you are not married then, you must give up your fortune, and—"

"It is not for my fortune that Ahmet is going to marry me, Nedjeb."

"Quite so; but there is no need to lose it by delay. Oh! if Seigneur Kéraban were my uncle!"

"What would you do if he were?"

"I would do nothing, dear mistress, as no one can do anything. Nevertheless, if he were here—if he arrived to—

day even—or to-morrow, or a little later, we would carry him to the judge, and have the contract completed. Afterwards we would go to the Imaun and be married, and well married too. The *fêtes* should be prolonged for fifteen days, and Seigneur Kéraban might go away then as soon as he pleased, if he wanted to return so particularly."

There could be no doubt that the arrangements as detailed by Nedjeb could be made and carried out, if Seigneur Kéraban did not tarry longer in Constantinople. The contract would be registered before the Mollah, who filled the position of a ministerial officer, a contract by which the future husband bound himself to give his wife furniture and kitchen utensils. Then came the religious ceremony, and the various formalities—all of which could be accomplished within the period that Nedjeb named. But still, was it necessary that Kéraban, whose presence as guardian of his nephew was indispensable, should occupy in business the few days which the impatient waiting-woman so anxiously claimed for her charming mistress?

Just then the girl exclaimed, "See what a pretty vessel is just coming to anchor under the garden steps!"

"So there is," said Amasia.

Immediately the two girls proceeded towards the steps which led to the water's edge, so that they might more conveniently observe the graceful little vessel which had just "brought up" opposite.

It was the felucca. The sail was still brailed up, and she was running in under the impetus of a light breeze. She came to anchor within a cable's length of the shore, and dipped gently to the wavy undulations of the water which broke on the foot of the steps. The Turkish flag floated from the mast.

"Can you read her name?" inquired Amasia.

"Yes," replied Nedjeb. "See, there it is on the stern. The *Guidare*."

So it was. Captain Yarhud had come to an anchor in this part of the bay, but it did not appear as if he intended to remain, because his sails were not furled, and a sailor would have noticed that the ship was in sea-going trim.

"Truly," remarked Nedjeb, "it would be very pleasant

to have a sail in that vessel upon such a blue sea, and with such a gentle wind, just enough to make it bend over with those great sails."

Then, in the mutability of her imagination, the young Zingara, perceiving a casket, in which were some jewels, upon a small table near the divan, opened the case and said, "Ah! look at the beautiful things Seigneur Ahmet has brought for you. It must be more than an hour since we looked at them!"

"Do you think so?" murmured Amasia, taking out a necklace and a pair of bracelets, which glittered as she held them up.

"With these jewels Seigneur Ahmet hopes to make you more beautiful, but he will not succeed!" remarked Nedjeb.

"What do you say?" replied Amasia. "Where is the woman who would not gain by wearing such beautiful ornaments as these? Look at these diamonds from Visapour; they are exquisitely brilliant, almost fiery, and remind me of the eyes of my *fiancé*."

"Oh, dear lady, when yours look at him, do you not offer him a gift equal to his own?"

"Silly child!" replied Amasia. "Look at this sapphire of Ormuz; and these pearls of Ophir; these turquoises of Macedonia—"

"Turquoise for turquoisc," said Nedjeb, laughing joyously. "The Seigneur Ahmet will not lose by the exchange."

"Fortunately he is not near, Nedjeb, to hear you say so."

"Ah! but if he were, he would tell you the same, and his words would have greater value than mine."

Then, taking up a pair of slippers which were lying near, she continued, "Look at these pretty 'babouches,' all embroidered and trimmed with swan's-down, made for a pretty pair of little feet I know. Let me see if I can put them on for you."

"Try them on yourself, Nedjeb."

"I?" exclaimed the girl.

"This is not the first time that, to please me, you—"

"Certainly, certainly," replied Nedjeb. "Yes, I have

already tried on your pretty dresses, and I went out upon the terrace, where they took me for you. If I was only pretty enough!—but no! that never will be, and to-day less than ever. Let me try these pretty slippers on.”

“Do you wish it?” said Amasia, as she yielded to the girl’s solicitations. So Nedjeb put on her young mistress’s feet the slippers which were worthy of a place in a glass case of curiosities. “Ah, how can you now venture to walk in them?” exclaimed the young Zingara. “Your head may now be jealous of your feet.”

“You make me laugh, Nedjeb,” replied Amasia. “Yet—”

“And those arms, those beautiful arms, which you leave quite unadorned! Why should you? Seigneur Ahmet has not forgotten them, not he! I see here some bracelets which will suit them to a nicety. Poor little arms!—how badly they have treated you! Fortunately I am here.”

And, laughing all the time, Nedjeb passed two magnificent bracelets on Amasia’s wrists, and they looked more resplendent upon the white skin than within their case of velvet.

Amasia let her do as she pleased. Every ornament spoke to her of Ahmet, and to the incessant chatter of Nedjeb, her eyes, glancing from one jewel to another, responded in silence.

“Amasia, dearest!”

The girl at these words rose hastily, and met a young man whose twenty-two years suited well his *fiancé* of sixteen. Ahmet was somewhat above the middle height, of a good figure; easy, yet somewhat dignified: his black eyes wore a very sweet expression, and flashed like lightning in his passionate moments. His hair was brown and curly beneath his fez, his small moustache was trimmed Albanian fashion; his teeth were white—in fact, there was an aristocratic air about him, if the term “aristocratic” is permissible in referring to a man in whose country there is no hereditary aristocracy.

Ahmet adhered strictly to the Turkish dress. He could not do otherwise, being the nephew of such an uncle. His well-made costume became him well; it was of rich material, and in good taste.

The young man advanced and seized the hands of his affianced bride, obliging her to reseal herself, while Nedjeb said,—

"Well, Seigneur Ahmet, is there any news from Constantinople?"

"No," replied Ahmet, "not even a business letter from my uncle Kéraban."

"Oh, the wretch!" exclaimed Nedjeb.

"I cannot myself understand," said the young man, "why the courier has not brought any letter from him. This is the day he never fails to let us have some information, and to arrange matters with the banker; yet your father has not received any letters from him either."

"For a punctilious man of business, like your uncle, this certainly is a circumstance to wonder at, dear Ahmet. Perhaps a telegram—"

"He send a telegram! My dear Amasia, you know quite well he would no more telegraph than he would travel by railway. Utilize modern inventions, even for business! He would rather receive bad news by letter than good news by the telegraph, I believe. Ah, Uncle Kéraban—"

"You have written to him, of course, dear Ahmet?" asked the girl, whose gaze was tenderly fixed upon her *fiancé*.

"I have written to him a dozen times, to beg him to fix an earlier date for our marriage. I have told him over and over again that he was acting a barbarous part—"

"Good!" exclaimed Nedjeb.

"That he had no heart; though the best of men—"

"Oh!" said Nedjeb, shaking her head.

"Yet he had no pity," continued Ahmet, "while acting the part of father to his nephew. But he replied that so long as he came within six weeks we had no reason to complain!"

"Well, we must only wait his good pleasure, Ahmet."

"Wait, wait!" exclaimed the young man. "He is robbing us of so many days of happiness!"

"Men who have done no worse are often arrested," remarked Nedjeb, tapping her foot impatiently.

"What shall I do? await Uncle Kéraban? I declare, if

he does not answer my letter by to-morrow, I will go to Constantinople—!"

"No, dear Ahmet," said Amasia, seizing his hand, as if to detain him, "I should suffer so much by your absence that the few days gained would not please me at all; they would not recompense me for the separation. No, stay where you are: who knows? Perhaps something may alter your uncle's determination."

"Alter Uncle Kéraban's determination! You might as well hope to change the course of the stars, to make the moon rise instead of the sun, to change the laws of the universe—as to alter Kéraban's decision," said Ahmet.

"Ah, if I were his niece!" said Nedjeb.

"What would you do then?" asked Ahmet.

"I would seize his caftan, so that—"

"You would only succeed in tearing it."

"Well, then, I would pull his beard for him, hard!"

"His beard might even be pulled off altogether," replied Ahmet.

"And yet," said Amasia, "Seigneur Kéraban is the best of men."

"No doubt, no doubt," replied Ahmet; "but so headstrong, so obstinate, that if an encounter were to take place between him and a mule, I should decline to bet on the latter."

CHAPTER IX.

SHOWING HOW CAPTAIN YARHUD VERY NEARLY
SUCCEEDED IN HIS ENTERPRISE.

WHILE Ahmet was speaking, one of the servants of the house, whose duty, according to Ottoman usage, was only to announce visitors and nothing else, appeared at the entrance of the gallery.

"Seigneur Ahmet," he said, addressing the young man, "a stranger is below and desires to speak with you."

"Who is he?" asked Ahmet.

"A Maltese captain; he insists upon seeing you, and says you will receive him."

"Very well, I will come down," said Ahmet.

"My dear Ahmet, why not receive him here, if he has nothing of a private nature to communicate?" said Amasia.

"Perhaps he commands that pretty felucca," observed Nedjeb, indicating the vessel which was anchored off the steps.

"Perhaps he does," said Ahmet; "let him come in!"

The servant retired, and almost immediately afterwards the stranger presented himself.

Captain Yarhud—for he it was—had, greatly to his chagrin, been delayed considerably in his voyage. Immediately he and Scarpante, the intendant, had parted, the captain had started for Odessa by railway, and had thus got in advance of Kéraban by many days. But when the worthy Yarhud had reached Odessa, he found the weather so bad that he could not put to sea. The wind had only moderated that morning sufficiently to permit his making sail, and he had accordingly come out and anchored before the banker's villa. So after all he had obtained but a little start of Kéraban, and the delay might prove very prejudicial to his interests.

Yarhud felt he must commence operations without losing an hour. His plans were all laid ; he must try strategy first, and force after, if his *ruse* did not succeed. But it was necessary that Amasia should be allured on board the *Guidare* that very day ; thus, before the alarm could be given and pursuit made, the felucca, he hoped, would be well on her way, running before the stiff nor'-wester.

Such abductions as Yarhud contemplated were by no means infrequent upon the coast—more frequent than one would imagine ; nor are they altogether limited to Turkish territory. It is not very many years ago since Odessa was thrown into consternation by a series of abductions, the authors of which could not be traced. A number of young girls belonging to the highest grade of society disappeared, and it was only too certain that they had been carried away into slavery and sold in the markets of Asia Minor.

Now what had been done in the capital of southern Russia, Yarhud hoped to repeat for the benefit of Seigneur Saffar. This was not the first time either that the *Guidare* had been employed in such traffic, and the captain valued his profits on the transaction at more than ten per cent. !

Yarhud's plan was as follows :—to allure the young lady on board the *Guidare* under the pretence of showing her and selling to her many rich stuffs which he had bought from the principal markets on the coast. Ahmet would most likely accompany Amasia on her first visit, but he trusted she would return again with Nedjeb. It would then be possible to put to sea before assistance could be given. If, however, Amasia could not be tempted on board, then Yarhud intended to use force. The banker's house was in a manner isolated at the curve of the bay, and his domestics were no match for the crew of the felucca ; but there might be fighting, and in that case people would quickly ascertain the circumstances under which the abduction had been carried out. So it was much the better policy, in the interest of the abductors, that the affair should be accomplished without any disturbance.

“Seigneur Ahmet ?” said the captain, interrogatively, as

he entered the gallery, accompanied by one of his crew, who carried some fabrics in his arms.

"I am he," replied the young man; "and you are—?"

"Captain Yarhud, commanding the felucca *Guidare* which is moored yonder."

"What is your business?"

"Seigneur Ahmet," said the captain, "I have heard of your approaching marriage."

"You have then heard, captain, of that which most dearly concerns me."

"I can quite understand that," replied the captain, turning towards Amasia; "so I had the idea that I might perhaps place at your disposal all the rich things which my vessel contains."

"Well, that is not a bad idea of yours, Captain Yarhud," replied Ahmet.

"My dear Ahmet, what can I possibly want with more than I have?" said Amasia.

"Who knows?" replied Ahmet. "These Levantine captains have often an extensive assortment of valuable things, and we may as well inspect them."

"Yes; we must inspect them, and purchase some too," exclaimed Nedjeb; "and ruin Seigneur Kéraban, which will punish him for his delay."

"What does your cargo consist of, captain?" inquired Ahmet.

"Valuable stuffs which I have purchased at various places where they are made," replied Yarhud, "and in which I usually trade."

"Very well; we must let these young women see them—they know more about such things than I do; and I shall be very glad, my dear Amasia, if amongst the cargo of the *Guidare* you can find some pretty things to please you."

"I have no doubt about it," replied Yarhud; "and besides, I have brought some samples with me, which I pray you to examine before you go on board."

"Let us see them!" exclaimed Nedjeb. "But I tell you beforehand, captain, you have nothing in any way too beautiful for my mistress."

"Certainly not. That is true," remarked Ahmet.

At a sign from Yarhud, the sailor who accompanied him unrolled some samples, which the captain presented to the young lady.

"Here are some Broussa silks, embroidered with silver," he said. "They are intended for sale in the bazaars of Constantinople."

"That is certainly a beautiful fabric," said Amasia, as she examined the silk, which under the skilful fingers of Nedjeb scintillated like luminous tissue.

"See! see!" cried the Zingara, "we could not have found anything better in the merchants' houses in Odessa."

"That really appears to have been made expressly for you, my dear Amasia," said Ahmet.

"I would suggest that you should also examine these muslins from Scutari and Turnova. From this sample you may judge of the exquisite workmanship. But you will be fairly surprised, when you come on board, by the variety of the designs, and the colours of the fabrics."

"Well, it is quite understood that we are going to visit the *Guidare*, captain," said Nedjeb.

"You will never regret your visit," replied Yarhud. "But permit me to show you some other articles. Here are brocades studded with diamonds; chemises of silk; crape of diaphanous texture; tissues for *feredjis*, muslins for *jacmalls*, Persian shawls for girdles, taffetas for *pantalons*."

Amasia could not sufficiently admire the magnificent stuffs which the Maltese captain unfolded before her, and displayed with such cunning artifice. If he were as good a sailor as he was a skilful trader, the *Guidare* would never meet with any mishap under Yarhud's command. All women—and young Turkish women are no exception to the general rule—permit themselves to be tempted by the sights of fabrics from the best looms of the East.

Ahmet perceived at once how much struck Amasia was with the display, and certainly, as Nedjeb had said, neither the bazaars of Odessa nor Constantinople, not even the great stores of Ludovic, the celebrated Armenian merchant, could offer a more extended choice.

"Dearest Amasia," said Ahmet, "you would not like this worthy captain to take all this trouble for nothing. Since he has shown you these beautiful things, and there are even more beautiful ones on board, we may, I think pay the vessel a visit."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Nedjeb, who could not remain still. She ran down to the edge of the water as she spoke.

"And," continued Ahmet, "we shall no doubt find some silk goods which will satisfy Nedjeb too."

"Well, and must not I have something to do honour to the wedding-day?" retorted Nedjeb, who had overheard him; "something to celebrate my mistress's wedding with the generous Seigneur Ahmet?"

"So good as he is too," added Amasia, extending her hand to her affianced husband.

"That is settled, then, captain," said Ahmet; "you will see us on board your vessel."

"At what hour?" inquired Yarhud, "for I would like to show you all my fine things."

"Say in the afternoon," replied Ahmet.

"Why not at once?" said Nedjeb.

"Oh, the impatient creature!" replied Amasia, laughing. "She is even more anxious than I am to visit this floating bazaar. One might very easily perceive that Ahmet has promised her a present which will make her smarter and more coquettish than ever."

"Coquettish for you alone, my dearest mistress," said Nedjeb in an affectionate manner.

"It only rests with you, Seigneur Ahmet," said Yarhud. "You can go on board at once, if you please. My gig can be brought to the steps, and in a few strokes we shall be on board."

"Let us go, then, captain," said Ahmet.

"Yes, yes, let us go on board!" exclaimed Nedjeb.

"Very well, since Nedjeb wishes it," added Amasia.

Then Captain Yarhud told the sailor to gather up all the samples which he had brought; and while the man was thus occupied, he himself advanced to the edge of the terrace and hailed the *Guidare*.

Immediately there was a movement on board. The

boat was launched, and in five minutes, under the impulse of four strong rowers, the gig came alongside the steps of the terrace. Captain Yarhud then signified to Ahmet that he was at the young man's disposal.

Yarhud, notwithstanding his habitual self-command, could scarcely conceal his satisfaction at the turn things had taken, and at the opportunity which had presented itself. Time pressed, for Kéraban might arrive now at any moment, and there was nothing to prevent his remaining for a day or two to celebrate the wedding of the young couple. Now Amasia, as the wife of Ahmet, would not be an acceptable visitor at the palace of the Seigneur Saffar.

Yes; Captain Yarhud felt as if suddenly impelled to act by force. It was quite in his line to act without any consideration or scruple. Besides, the circumstances were all favourable, and the wind was in the proper quarter for his enterprise. The vessel would be well in the offing before any pursuit could be attempted, even supposing the abduction were immediately discovered. Had Ahmet been absent, Yarhud would not have hesitated to carry Amasia and her maid on board then and there, and put to sea with them, while they were engaged in examining the various fabrics in the cabin. It would be easy enough to keep them prisoners, and stifle their cries until the *Guidare* had gained the open sea. With Ahmet present the difficulties had increased, but were not insurmountable. The captain would not hesitate to put Ahmet "out of the way," if necessary. The murder would be put in the bill, and Seigneur Saffar would have to pay the increased cost: that would be all!

Yarhud remained standing on the steps, and thinking what course would be best, when he had persuaded Ahmet and his companions to embark in the boat for the *Guidare*, which lay scarcely a cable's length away, lifting gently to the motion of the waves.

Ahmet, standing upon the lowest step, was about to hand Amasia to her seat in the stern of the gig, when the door leading into the gallery opened, and a man of about fifty years of age, dressed something in the European style, entered hurriedly.

"Amasia! Ahmet!" he cried.

This was Selim the banker, the father of Amasia and the correspondent of Kéraban.

"Daughter—Ahmet! Where are you?"

"Father, what is the matter?" exclaimed Amasia.

"Why have you returned so quickly?"

"I have important news."

"Good news?" asked Ahmet.

"Excellent," replied Selim. "An express sent by Kéraban has just reached me."

"Really!" exclaimed Nedjeb.

"A special messenger, who has advised me of Kéraban's speedy arrival. He was not far in advance of your uncle."

"Uncle Kéraban! Do you mean that he has left Constantinople?" cried Ahmet.

"Yes, and I am expecting him here."

Fortunately for the captain of the *Guidare*, no one perceived the angry gestures with which he received this intelligence. The sudden arrival of Ahmet's uncle was a contingency which would seriously interfere with the accomplishment of the worthy captain's designs.

"Ah! Seigneur Kéraban is good," exclaimed Nedjeb.

"But why is he coming?" asked Amasia.

"For your marriage, my dear young lady," replied the attendant. "What other object could bring him to Odessa?"

"That must be the reason," said Selim.

"I think so too," said Ahmet. "Else why need he have quitted Constantinople? He must be enchanted. Fancy my worthy uncle leaving his business suddenly without any previous intimation of his intention. He wishes to surprise us."

"He will be well received and gladly welcomed," said Nedjeb.

"Did not his messenger tell you the reason for his coming?" inquired Amasia of her father.

"No, nothing whatever," replied Selim. "The man had ridden post from Majaki, where Kéraban's carriage was changing horses. He came to the banking-house and merely announced the immediate arrival of Kéraban at

Odessa, and as he will halt nowhere, we may expect him at any moment."

If the contumacious Kéraban was at that time endowed with all the most amiable qualities of mankind as friend, uncle, and "seigneur," by those interested, can we be surprised? His unexpected arrival meant the celebration of the wedding between Amasia and Ahmet, and the happiness of the young people was assured; no fatal delay would mar their future. Ah, if Kéraban were the most obstinate, he was, nevertheless, the best of men.

Yarhud, impassible as ever, was a spectator of this family scene; but he had not sent his boat away. It was very important that he should become aware of the plans of the Seigneur Kéraban; indeed he was afraid that he would insist upon the marriage of Amasia before he continued his journey around the Black Sea.

At that moment voices, which overpowered a more imperious voice, were heard outside. The door opened, and Kéraban, followed by Van Mitten, Bruno, and Nizib, entered the gallery.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH AHMET, IN DEFERENCE TO CIRCUMSTANCES,
MAKES AN ENERGETIC RESOLUTION.

"Good day, friend Selim, good day. May Allah protect you and yours!"

So saying, Kéraban shook Selim's hand warmly.

"Good day, nephew Ahmet;" and then Kéraban folded the young man in his arms.

"Good day, my little Amasia," he continued, kissing the girl on both cheeks.

All this passed so quickly that no one had any time to reply to the salutations.

"Now we had better be going," said Kéraban, turning to Van Mitten.

The phlegmatic Dutchman, who had not been introduced, appeared like some strange personage in the scene. Seeing Kéraban distributing his hand-shakes and embraces with such prodigality, Van Mitten had no doubt that his friend had come to hasten the marriage; but when Kéraban cried "*en route*," the Dutchman was greatly amazed.

It was Ahmet, however, who first interposed.

"How!" he exclaimed. "Going away?"

"Yes, we are off again, nephew."

"You really are going, uncle?"

"This moment."

The general astonishment was very marked, and Van Mitten whispered to Bruno,—

"Certainly this way of acting is very characteristic of my friend Kéraban."

"Very much so," replied Bruno.

Meanwhile Amasia looked at Ahmet, who looked at Selim, while Nedjeb had eyes for no one but this mysterious uncle who was anxious to get away almost before you could say he had arrived.

"Come along, Van Mitten," said Kéraban, as he turned to the door.

"Monsieur, will you tell me—" said Ahmet to Van Mitten.

"What can I tell you?" asked the Dutchman, turning round suddenly, for he was following his host.

But Kéraban returned as he was at the door, and said, addressing the banker,—

"By the way, friend Selim, can you change me a few thousand piastres?"

"A few thousand piastres!" echoed Selim, who did not understand.

"Yes, Selim; for Russian money: I want some for my journey in Muscovite territory."

"But, uncle, will you tell us," began Ahmet, who was standing now beside Amasia,—“will you tell us—”

"At what rate is the exchange?" continued Kéraban, without paying any attention to Ahmet.

"Three and a half per cent.," replied Selim, in whom the banker at once predominated.

"What! three and a half!"

"Roubles are at a premium," replied Selim. "On the Exchange they are asking—"

"Look here, friend Selim, it must be three and a quarter for me: you understand—three and a quarter."

"Oh, yes—for you certainly, friend Kéraban—and without any commission at all."

Selim evidently had no longer any definite idea of what he was saying or doing.

All this time Yarhud at the end of the gallery was listening to what was going on very attentively. Would the issue be favourable or unfavourable to his projects?

Ahmet now seized his uncle by the arm, and, not without difficulty, succeeded in stopping him.

"Uncle," he said, "you have embraced us all just when you have arrived—"

"Just as I am about to go away, you mean," replied Kéraban.

"Well, be it so: I do not wish to contradict you. But at least tell me why you have come to Odessa."

"Because Odessa was in my way. Had Odessa not been a stage in my journey, I should not have come here. Is not that so, Van Mitten?"

The Dutchman contented himself by assenting with a nod.

"Ah, yes, by-the-bye, you have not been introduced. I must present you." Then, addressing Selim, Kéraban continued,—

"My friend Van Mitten, my correspondent at Rotterdam, whom I am bringing to dine with me at Scutari."

"At Scutari!" exclaimed the banker.

"It seems so," said Van Mitten.

"And Bruno his servant," continued Kéraban; "a brave follower who does not wish to be separated from his master."

"It seems so," said Bruno, like an echo.

"Now, let us be off," said the impetuous Turk.

"If it must be so, uncle," said Ahmet, "we will not endeavour to detain you. But if you are only here because Odessa happens to be in your way, may I inquire what route you are taking for Scutari?"

"The route which leads round the Black Sea."

"Around the Black Sea!" exclaimed Ahmet.

A dead silence supervened for a few seconds, and then Kéraban said, "Well, if you please, what is there so very surprising in that? Is there anything so very extraordinary in our going from Constantinople to Scutari by the sea-coast route?"

Selim and Ahmet looked at each other significantly. Was the rich merchant of Galata going mad?

"Friend Kéraban," said the banker at length, "we do not wish to oppose you in any way." This was the usual phrase, and a prudent one when dealing with the obstinate Kéraban. "We have no wish to contradict you at all, only it appears to us that you might have perhaps reached Scutari more directly by crossing the Bosphorus."

"There is no longer any Bosphorus!" said Kéraban.

"No longer any Bosphorus!" exclaimed Ahmet.

"Not for me—which is the same thing. There is a strait for such people as will submit to pay an iniquitous tax of four paras a head; a tax which these new Turks have imposed upon waters which have hitherto been free as air."

"What! a new tax?" said Ahmet, who at once comprehended the situation, and that his uncle had had some discussion in which his obstinacy had refused to give way: hence his departure from Constantinople.

"Yes," exclaimed Kéraban, working himself into a pitch of excitement. "Just as I was about to cross in my caïque to dine at Scutari with my friend Van Mitten, this tax was ordained. Naturally I refused to pay it. The officials refused to let me pass. I said that I knew how to reach Scutari without crossing the Bosphorus. They said I could not: I replied that I could. And so I will, by Allah! I would rather have my hand cut off than pay those ten paras. No, by Mahomet, they do not know Kéraban!"

Evidently *they* did not know Kéraban. But Selim, Ahmet, Van Mitten, and Amasia knew him; and they perceived that, after what had passed, all their efforts to change his resolution would be in vain. There was no use in attempting to argue the point. Discussion would have only led to complications. They must accept the situation, and without any consultation it was accepted unanimously.

"After all, you are right, uncle," said Ahmet.

"Quite right," added Selim.

"I am always right," replied Kéraban modestly.

"One ought to resist such iniquitous imposts," continued Ahmet, "even though it cost you a fortune."

"Even my life," said Kéraban.

"You have done well to refuse payment, and to show that you can reach Scutari from Constantinople without crossing the Bosphorus."

"And without paying ten paras," added Kéraban; "even though the alternative cost me five hundred thousand!"

"But you are not absolutely compelled to leave here at once, I suppose," said Ahmet persuasively.

"Absolutely compelled, nephew," replied Kéraban. "I suppose you are aware that I must return in less than six weeks."

"Quite so, uncle—so you can give us eight days in Odessa."

"Not five days—not four—not one day—not an hour!" exclaimed Kéraban.

Ahmet, perceiving that the natural obstinacy of the man was cropping up, signed to Amasia to intercede.

"And our marriage, Monsieur Kéraban?" asked the girl modestly, taking his hand.

"Your marriage, Amasia. That will still be a fixture. It must be accomplished before the end of next month, and so it shall be. My journey will not retard it by a day—if I leave here at once!"

So crumbled the castle in the air which had been erected: the scaffolding of hopes which had been put up on the unexpected arrival of Kéraban fell to the ground. The wedding would not be hastened, but on the other hand it would not be delayed. How could he count upon the accomplishment of the conditions, with a long and toilsome journey in prospect?

Ahmet could not restrain an angry movement, which fortunately his uncle did not observe, any more than he noticed the shade of disappointment on Amasia's brow, or than he heard Nedjeb's whisper of "Oh, the wretch!"

"Besides," continued Kéraban in the tone of a person who makes a proposition to which no possible exception can be taken,—“besides, I count upon Ahmet accompanying me!"

"That is a home-thrust which will be difficult to parry," whispered Van Mitten to Bruno.

"They will not parry it," said the valet.

In fact, Ahmet had received it full in his heart. Amasia also was struck dumb and remained motionless, by the verdict which was to deprive her of her affianced husband. She clung to Nedjeb, who would have liked to tear Kéraban's eyes out!

The captain of the *Guidtre* did not lose a word of the conversation. Things were taking a turn favourable for him.

Selim now thought it time to interpose, though he had no hope of altering Kéraban's determination; so he said,—

"Is it really necessary that your nephew should accompany you on your tour of the Black Sea, Kéraban?"

"Necessary, no; but I do not think that Ahmet will decline to accompany me!"

"Nevertheless—" continued Selim.

"Nevertheless what?" cried Kéraban, grinding his teeth, —and this question closed the discussion.

There was again silence for a space which seemed interminable. Meantime Ahmet made his decision boldly. He spoke to his *fiancée* apart, and succeeded in making her understand that, however terrible the parting would be, there was nothing to be gained by resisting the mandate; that, without him, the journey would very likely be prolonged and meet with numerous delays, which his perfect acquaintance with the Russian language would remove. So, by accompanying his uncle, Ahmet decided that no time would be lost, and he would also hasten the journey, even though it cost three times as much; and he would all the more certainly bring Kéraban back in time for the wedding, fixed to take place at the end of the following month.

Amasia had not the courage to say yes; but she understood that Ahmet was right.

"Very well, uncle," said the young man, "I will accompany you; I am ready to go; but—"

"Oh, we will have no conditions, nephew."

"Unconditionally, then," said Ahmet; "but," he added mentally, "I will make you run till you are out of breath, pig-headed uncle that you are!"

"Now we must start," said Kéraban: and, turning to Selim, "Are those roubles ready?" he asked.

"I will give them to you at Odessa, whither I will accompany you," replied Selim.

"Are you ready, Van Mitten?"

"Always ready," replied the Dutchman.

"Well, now, Ahmet, embrace your *fiancée*, and let us be gone."

Ahmet threw his arms round the young girl, who was bathed in tears.

"Do not cry, dearest Amasia," he said: "if our marriage is not advanced, it will not be postponed, I promise you that. Only a few weeks—"

"Ah, my dear mistress," said Nedjeb, "if Scigneur Kéraban would only break a leg or two before he leaves this place! Shall I see about it?"

But Amasia desired the maid to hold her tongue. Still, Nedjeb was quite capable of carrying out her threat, or of finding some other means to stop the intractable uncle.

Farewells were exchanged, the last kisses given; nearly every one present was more or less affected; even the Dutchman felt an accelerated movement of the heart. Kéraban alone saw nothing, and wished to see nothing, of the general sorrow and tenderness.

"Is the chaise ready?" he asked.

"The chaise is ready," replied Nizib.

"Come along, then. Ah! you new-fashioned Turks, who dress like Europeans, who do not even know how to get fat." (This was evidently an unpardonable sin in Kéraban's eyes.) "Ah! you renegades, who submit to the decrees of Mahmoud: I will show you that there is still one of the old believers left, of whom you will never get the better!"

No one contradicted him, yet he proceeded in a still more excited manner,—

"Ah! you pretend to monopolize the Bosphorus, do you? Well, I will get to the opposite side of it. *That* for your Bosphorus! I laugh at your Bosphorus. What did you say, Van Mitten?"

"I said nothing," replied Van Mitten, who had taken very good care not to open his mouth.

"Your Bosphorus—their Bosphorus," continued Kéraban, shaking his fist towards the south. "Fortunately the Black Sea is there, and it has a coast-line not exclusively for caravans. I will follow that road. I will circumambulate it; and you will see the faces of your officials, when I appear upon the heights of Scutari, without having thrown my paras into the box of that set of administrative mendicants."

We must confess that Kéraban, when he reached this crowning invective, was really magnificent in his anger.

"Come, Ahmet; come, Van Mitten. Away, away, away!"

He had reached the door, when Selim detained him,—
“Friend Kéraban,” said he, “permit me a simple observation.”

“I will have no observations.”

“Well, then, a remark which I wish to make,” persisted the banker.

“We have no time.”

“Listen to me,” continued Selim. “When you have reached Scutari, having made the tour of the Black Sea, what will you do?”

“I—do? why—I—I—”

“You do not, I suppose, intend to remain at Scutari for ever, without visiting Constantinople, where your business house is?”

“No,” replied Kéraban, with some hesitation.

“In fact, uncle,” said Ahmet, “if you still continue obstinate about crossing the Bosphorus, our wedding—”

“Friend Selim,” interrupted Kéraban, eluding the main point, “nothing can be more simple. What is there to prevent you and Amasia from coming to Scutari? It will cost you ten paras each, it is true, to cross the Bosphorus, but your honour is not pledged like mine in the matter.”

“Yes, yes, come to Scutari in a month,” exclaimed Ahmet. “We will meet you there, dear Amasia; and, you may depend upon it, we will not keep you waiting.”

“So be it. We meet at Scutari,” said Selim, “and then the marriage shall be celebrated. But, after all, Kéraban, when the wedding is over, will you not return to Constantinople?”

“Certainly; I will return—certainly,” said Kéraban.

“How?”

“Well, if the vexatious tax has been abolished, I will cross the Bosphorus without paying.”

“And if the tax be not removed?” said Selim.

“If it be not taken off,” said Kéraban, with a superb gesture, “then, by Allah, I will retrace my steps, and make the tour of the Black Sea over again!”

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH A SOMEWHAT DRAMATIC INCIDENT OCCURS
IN THE FANTASTIC HISTORY OF THE JOURNEY.

THEY had departed. They had quitted the villa : Seigneur Kéraban to accomplish his journey, Van Mitten to accompany his friend, Ahmet to follow his uncle, Nizib and Bruno because they could not do otherwise. The villa was practically deserted, because we need not reckon ladies and the five or six servants who continued their ordinary avocations. Selim himself accompanied the travellers to Odessa, to change the money required for the expedition.

The villa, therefore, now contained only the two girls, Amasia and Nedjeb.

The Maltese captain was quite aware of this. He had followed all the incidents of the leave-taking with unflinching interest. Would Seigneur Kéraban postpone the marriage until his return ? He had postponed it for the present—one trump in the captain's hand already ! Would Ahmet consent to accompany his uncle ? He had consented—trump number two !

Now the Maltese had a third "honour" in his hand. Amasia and her attendant were left alone in the gallery which opened to the sea. The vessel he commanded was lying off shore ; his boat was at the steps. His sailors were accustomed to obey his merest sign. He had nothing to wish for.

The captain was sorely tempted to employ violent measures in the abduction of Amasia ; but as he was really a prudent man, and did not wish to leave anything to "chance," he decided to leave no traces behind him. So he reflected seriously upon the means to be employed.

It was then broad day. If he attempted to carry away Amasia by force, she would call for assistance, and Nedjeb

would join in giving the alarm. Perhaps they would be heard by the servants; the *Guidare* would be noticed sailing rapidly away; and the clue to the outrage would be supplied. No; better wait until darkness fell, and meantime act circumspectly. One important point had been already gained—Ahmet was away.

So the Maltese remained aloof, seated in the stern-sheets of his gig, which was partially concealed by the balustrade, and watched the two girls. They scarcely bestowed a thought upon that very dangerous personage in their vicinity.

If, however, the young people, in consequence of the arrangements already made, would consent to go on board the felucca to examine the stuffs, or for any other purpose—and Yarhud had some idea concerning this—he would be able to make up his mind, and decide the question without waiting for night.

After Ahmet's departure, Amasia, struck down by the sudden blow, remained pensive and silent, tearfully regarding the distant northern horizon, where lay the path which the travellers must follow, and on which route lay so many dangers and delays, that would try the endurance of Seigneur Kéraban and his companions, whom he dragged, unwilling, at his chariot wheels. Had the marriage been solemnized, Amasia would have unhesitatingly accompanied Ahmet. Would his uncle have opposed it? No, he would not have wished to do so. Once she had become his niece, she fancied she would acquire some influence over him, and she would have arrested him in the dangerous course on which his obstinacy had launched him. Now she was alone, and had to wait many weeks before she and Ahmet could be again united in the Scutari villa, or their wedding solemnized.

But if Amasia was sad, Nedjeb was furious, and vented her indignation upon the headstrong merchant who had been the cause of the separation. Ah! if her own marriage had been in question, the young Zingara would never have permitted him to carry off her intended. She would have met obstinacy with obstinacy. No; nothing of the kind would have happened in her case!

Nedjeb approached her young mistress, and, taking her by the hand, led her to the sofa, whereon she forced her to repose; then, taking a stool, she seated herself by her mistress.

"In your place," said Nedjeb, "instead of thinking of Seigneur Ahmet, and lamenting his absence, I would think of Seigneur Kéraban and abuse him roundly."

"What good would that do?" said Amasia listlessly.

"I fancy we should be less sad," replied Nedjeb. "If you like, we will heap a series of maledictions upon this uncle's head. He deserves them all, and I assure you I will give him full measure."

"No, Nedjeb," replied Amasia. "Let us rather speak of Ahmet. Of him alone ought I to think, and I only think of him."

"Let us then speak of him," said Nedjeb. "In truth, dear mistress, he is the most charming *fiancé* ever girl possessed; but what an uncle he has! That despot, that selfish wretch, who had only a word to say and did not say it—who refused to remain here for the few days he might have given us. Indeed, he deserves—"

"Let us talk of Ahmet," said Amasia.

"Yes. Ah! how he adores you! How happy you will be with him! He would be perfection if he had not such a man for his uncle. Of what can he be made, I wonder? Do you know, I think he has done wisely not to marry. Against such a disposition as his even the very slaves of the harem would have rebelled."

"There, you are speaking again of him," said Amasia, whose thoughts were running on Ahmet.

"No, no; I was talking of Seigneur Ahmet—I am, like yourself, thinking only of Ahmet. Yes, in his place I would not have given way. I would have insisted. I really thought he had more determination!"

"People would tell you, Nedjeb, that Ahmet has displayed more energy in yielding to, than he would have done if resisting his uncle's commands. Do not you perceive that, though it causes me anxiety, it is better he should go and thus endeavour to hasten the journey by all possible means, and

prevent the numerous dangers which Kéraban's obstinate rashness would lead to? No, Nedjeb, no; by going away Ahmet has proved his courage, and has given me another proof of his devotion."

"You may be right, my dear mistress," replied the attendant, who, carried away by her native vivacity, could not yield her opinion. "Yes, Seigneur Ahmet certainly showed energy in going away; but don't you think he would have displayed more had he prevented his uncle from going?"

"Was such a course possible?" said Amasia. "Now, Nedjeb, I ask you, *was* such a course possible?"

"Yes—no—perhaps," replied Nedjeb. "It was not a question of breaking an iron bar. Ah! that Kéraban! It is all his fault, and if any accident should happen, he alone will be responsible. When I think of his running into danger, simply because he won't pay ten paras, and imperilling the safety of Seigneur Ahmet, your safety, and consequently mine,—I wish; yes, I wish that the Black Sea extended to the end of the globe, to see whether he would be obstinate enough to make the tour."

"He would do it," replied Amasia, in a tone of sincere conviction. "But let us talk of Ahmet, Nedjeb, and of no one else but him."

At that moment Yarhud quitted his boat, and advanced unperceived towards the two girls. At the sound of his footsteps they turned round, and appeared surprised, as well as somewhat alarmed, at seeing the Maltese so near them.

Nedjeb at once arose and said,—

"Is that you, captain? How came you here? what do you want?"

"I do not want anything," replied Yarhud, pretending surprise at this reception. "I want nothing; I only came to put my services at your disposal for—"

"Well, for what?" said Nedjeb, as he paused.

"To conduct you on board the vessel," replied the captain. "Have not you decided to inspect the cargo, and to choose such articles as may seem good to you?"

"That is true, dear mistress," said Nedjeb. "We have promised the captain."

"Yes, we promised when Ahmet was here," replied Amasia. "But he has gone away, and it is no longer fitting for us to go on board the *Guidare*."

The captain frowned, but he quickly recovered himself, and replied calmly,—

"The *Guidare* cannot remain here long ; and I must sail to-morrow, or the day after at the latest. If the lady wishes to inspect my stock, and to purchase any of the goods, she must do so without delay, and take advantage of the opportunity now. My boat lies yonder, and we can be on board in a few minutes."

"We thank you, captain," replied Amasia coldly, "but I have no taste for such excursions in Seigneur Ahmet's absence. He must accompany us in our visit to the *Guidare*: he must assist us in our selection. He is no longer here, and I cannot, I will not, go without him."

"I am sorry for that," replied Yarhud ; "and all the more because, no doubt, Seigneur Ahmet will be agreeably surprised on his return to find you have made the purchases you wished. The opportunity will not occur again, and you will regret the loss of it."

"That is possible, captain," replied Nedjeb ; "but at this moment I think you would do better not to press the point."

"Be it so," replied Yarhud, bowing. "In any case, let me hope that, if, a few weeks hence, the chances of trade compel me to remain at Odessa, you will not forget the promise you have made, to honour me with a visit."

"We will not forget it, captain," said Amasia, as she signed to the Maltese to retire.

Yarhud saluted the girls and advanced some paces towards the terrace, when suddenly he stopped, as if an idea had just occurred to him, and, approaching Amasia, as she was about to quit the verandah, he said,—

"One word more—or rather let me offer a suggestion which cannot fail to be agreeable to the *fiancée* of the Seigneur Ahmet."

"What is the man worrying about?" exclaimed Amasia, who was somewhat impatient of the captain's persistency in intruding himself and his opinions at the villa.

"Chance has made me a spectator of the scene which took place before the departure of Seigneur Ahmet."

"Chance?" exclaimed Amasia, who had become distrustful, as if by presentiment of evil.

"Simply chance," repeated Yarhud. "I was in my boat, which is at your disposal."

"What proposition have you to make to us, captains?" inquired Amasia.

"A very natural one," he replied. "I have noticed how the daughter of Selim the banker has been affected by the sudden departure of Seigneur Ahmet, and if she would like to see him again once more—"

"See him once more? What *do* you mean?" exclaimed Amasia, whose heart was beating tumultuously.

"I mean," said Yarhud, "that in an hour Seigneur Kéraban's carriage will pass along the road which rounds yonder cape."

Amasia stepped forward and gazed at the headland indicated by the wily captain.

"There? Over there?" she said.

"Yes."

"Oh, my dear mistress, if we could only reach that point!"

"Nothing can be more easy," said Yarhud. "Within half an hour, with this breeze, the *Guidare* could get there; so if you like to come, you can embark at once."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Nedjeh, who in this excursion only perceived an opportunity for Amasia to see her affianced once again.

But Amasia was more prudent, and reflected upon the suggestion. The captain could scarcely control his impatience at her hesitation, and this anxiety had not escaped the banker's daughter. The appearance of Yarhud was not in his favour either, so she remained uninfluenced by the temptation.

"I await your orders," said the captain.

"No, captain," replied Amasia. "Were I to see my *fiancé* under such conditions, I believe I should give him more pain than pleasure."

Yarhud, comprehending that he had no hope of altering her determination, retired coldly.

The next moment the boat put off, and the captain and his men returned to the vessel. The gig remained alongside, however.

The girls continued together in the gallery an hour or more. Amasia was seated, leaning her elbows upon the balustrade, and was gazing anxiously towards the headland indicated by Yarhud, for at that point the carriage would be visible for a moment. Nedjeb also eagerly watched the place.

After the lapse of an hour or so, the Zingara exclaimed, "Ah! see, look yonder. Do you not perceive a carriage on the road? There, on the summit of the cliff."

"Yes, yes," replied Amasia. "That is their chaise. 'Tis he! 'tis he!"

"He cannot see you," said Nedjeb.

"What matter?" replied Amasia; "I know he is looking at me."

"No doubt of it, dear lady. His eyes will discern the villa, and perhaps ourselves."

"*Au revoir*, my Ahmet; *au revoir*!" cried Amasia, as he occupants of the carriage could have heard her farewell.

Amasia and Nedjeb quitted the gallery, and, as soon as the chaise had disappeared, they retired to the interior of the house.

Yarhud from the deck of his vessel perceived them departing, and gave orders to the men to watch for their return, as the evening approached. Then he arranged his plan, to gain by force what he could not effect by stratagem.

There was no such question of immediate hurry in the execution of the deed he proposed, since the marriage could not take place for six weeks, as Ahmet had gone away. Yet the impatience of Seigneur Saffar had to be considered, as well as his speedy return to Trebizond. Added to these impulses, the navigation of the Black Sea by a small sailing vessel, which might be retarded by calms or contrary winds, had to be taken into consideration, and fifteen or twenty days might be thus lost. On all accounts, therefore, Yarhud felt obliged to sail at the earliest possible moment, if he would arrive at the time agreed upon with Scarpante. Yarhud was, no doubt, a rogue, but he was a

rogue who kept his engagements. So he decided to act at once.

Circumstances favoured him. Towards evening—before her father had returned—Amasia re-entered the gallery, and this time alone. The girl wished to gaze on the distant hills which contained in their embrace him she loved best. She took her place again, and, leaning upon the balustrade, contemplated the darkening landscape with that fond, “far-off” expression in her eyes which no distance could remove.

Thus plunged in reverie, Amasia did not perceive that the boat put off from the *Guidare*. She did not notice its almost noiseless approach by the terrace, nor its bringing up at the steps close by. Nevertheless Yarhud and three of his men were even then creeping cautiously towards her, up the slope; but the girl never noticed their approach.

Suddenly Yarhud leaped up and seized her with such force that she had no power of resistance.

“Help! help!” she screamed.

Her cries were immediately stifled, but they had been heard by Nedjeb, who at once came in search of her mistress.

Scarcely had the waiting-maid passed the door of the gallery, when she was seized by two sailors, who at once prevented her from giving any alarm by word or deed.

“On board!” exclaimed Yarhud.

The two girls were at once forcibly carried to the boat, and rowed swiftly towards the *Guidare*, which, with her anchor a-peak and her sails hoisted, was lying-to, awaiting the captain’s return.

As soon as Amasia and Nedjeb were on board, they were carried to the stern cabin, where they could hear and see nothing of what passed, and the vessel was put before the wind, and her direction was made so that she would pass near the little creek at the extremity of the grounds of the villa.

But, rapidly as all this had been accomplished, the scene had attracted the attention of some of the out-door servants. They had heard Amasia’s cries, and had given the alarm.

At that moment Selim returned, and was informed of what

had passed. In agony he searched for his daughter—she had disappeared!

But perceiving the *Guidare* making for the point, Selim understood the whole matter in a moment. He quickly crossed the gardens, towards the place which the vessel must pass, so as to avoid the rocks at the extremity of the creek.

“Wretches!” he exclaimed. “They are taking away my daughter, Amasia. Stop them! Stop!”

A musket fired from the deck of the *Guidare* was the only response to this appeal. Selim fell with a bullet in his shoulder.

In another moment the felucca, with a flowing sheet, had disappeared from the sight of those at the villa.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH VAN MITTEN DISCOURSES ON TULIPS FOR,
WE TRUST, THE BENEFIT OF THE READER.

THE postchaise with fresh horses had quitted Odessa about one o'clock in the afternoon. Kéraban occupied the left corner of the interior, Van Mitten the right, and Ahmet was between them. Bruno and Nizib were in the "cabriolet," where they chatted or slept—chiefly the latter. The sun was shining brightly, and the sea broke in dark blue waves against the gray cliffs.

In the interior of the chaise conversation was at first as limited as in the "cabriolet" outside, and if one party slept higher, the other reflected more deeply. Kéraban was thinking of his firm determination, and of the "turn" he was giving the Ottoman authorities. Van Mitten was thinking of the unexpected journey he was making, and did not cease to wonder how it had happened that he, a citizen of Holland, had been launched thus upon a tour of the Black Sea, when he ought to be resting quietly in Pera or Constantinople.

Ahmet had made up his mind to the journey, but he determined not to spare his uncle's purse whenever delay or trouble might be avoided by using it. They would travel by the quickest and shortest route. The young man was ruminating on this, as the chaise turned the point, and he could perceive the banker's villa. He fixed his gaze upon it; no doubt at the same time Amasia's eyes were directed to the carriage, and their regards crossed in mid-air.

Then, addressing his uncle, Ahmet resolved to open a delicate question, and ask whether he had mastered all the details of the journey.

"Yes," replied Kéraban, "we shall continue upon the shore route all along."

"And whither are we bound just now?"

"To Koblewo, about twelve leagues from Odessa. We shall arrive at the place this evening."

"And after leaving Koblewo?"

"We shall travel all night, and reach Nikolaief to-morrow about midday. We shall then have made eighteen leagues more."

"Very good, uncle; we must travel quickly. But after leaving Nikolaief, don't you think of reaching the Caucasus district in a day or two?"

"How?" asked Kéraban.

"By taking the train. The South Russian line by Alexandroff and Rostow would enable us to accomplish a good third of our journey."

"Use a railway?" exclaimed Kéraban.

At that instant Van Mitten touched his youthful neighbour, and said in a low tone,—

"It is useless to discuss the question. He has a horror of railways."

Ahmet was not unaware of his uncle's peculiarities in this and other respects, but he fancied that for once he would yield. But Kéraban would not be Kéraban if he did give way.

"I think you were speaking of railways?" he said.

"Yes, uncle."

"And you wish that I should do what I have never yet done—"

"It seems to me—"

"You wish that I, Kéraban, should permit myself to be dragged like a fool along an iron rail by a steam engine?"

"When you have tried it—"

"Ahmet, it is evident you have not reflected upon this suggestion which you dare to make to me!"

"But, uncle—"

"I tell you, you have not thought of what you are saying."

"I assure you, uncle, that in the 'waggon'—"

"Waggon!" exclaimed Kéraban, with an accent impossible to describe.

"Yes, the carriages which run on the rails—"

"Rails? What horrible words are these?—and may I ask you what language you are speaking?"

"Only the language of modern travellers."

"Look here, nephew!" exclaimed Kéraban, who was getting excited, "do I look like a modern traveller? Do I look like a man who would permit himself to be dragged along in a 'waggon' b, a machine? Is it likely that I should slide along 'rails, when I can drive on a road?"

"When time presses, uncle—"

"Ahmet, look me in the face, and listen to me. If there are no carriages, I will go in a cart. If there is no cart, I will ride; if I cannot get a horse, I will hire a donkey. If there are no donkeys, I will walk; and, when I cannot walk, I will crawl; and, when I can no longer crawl, I—"

"For goodness' sake, stop!" cried Van Mitten.

"When I cannot crawl on hands and knees, I will drag myself along on my stomach," said Kéraban in conclusion—"yes, on my stomach!"

Then, seizing Ahmet by the arm, he said,—

"Did you ever hear that Mahomet took the train to go to Mecca?"

To this question there was obviously no answer; and Ahmet, who would have replied that, had railways existed in the time of Mahomet, he would no doubt have used them, thought it best to be silent: while Kéraban sat in his corner, grumbling, and condemning all words of a "railway" character.

However, if the chaise did not travel so rapidly as an express, it proceeded quickly. The horses went well upon the level road, and there was nothing to complain of. There was no want of relays. Ahmet, who, with his uncle's consent, had undertaken to pay the expenses, lavished "tips" freely on all concerned, with imperial generosity. Bank-notes flew out of his pocket, and he might have been starting a "paper chase" with rouble currency.

The result of all this liberality was that the travellers reached Koblewo the same day. Thence they turned more

inland, and crossing the Bug river, to the heights of Nikolaief, the chaise reached that town easily by midday on the 28th of August.

Three hours' rest was allowed for breakfast, &c., and Ahmet took the opportunity to write to Selim, the banker, telling him of the journey so far, and sending all kinds of messages to Amasia. Seigneur Kéraban occupied himself congenially in drinking coffee, and smoking. Van Mitten and Bruno explored the town, whose prosperity threatens to outdo its rival Kherson, and to usurp the title of the district from it.

Ahmet was the first to give the signal for departure. The Dutchman did not keep him waiting. Kéraban gave a last puff to his narghileh, as the postillion mounted his horse, and the carriage rolled away to Kherson.

There were seventeen leagues to travel across an uninteresting country. Here and there were a few mulberry-trees, poplars, and willows. As they approached the Dneiper, the course of which is terminated at Kherson, the travellers came upon long expanses of ground, planted with tall reeds, which appeared to be covered with the cornflower. But at the approach of the chaise, these "cornflowers" took to themselves wings, and proved to be blue jays, whose discordant chattering was as disagreeable to the ear as their beautiful colours were pleasant to the eye.

At daybreak on the 29th of August, Seigneur Kéraban and his companions reached Kherson without incident. Kherson is the chief seat of government, the foundation of which is due to Potemkin. The travellers could not but congratulate this creation of the imperial favour of Catherine II., for they found an excellent hotel, where they stopped several hours, and some good shops, where they were enabled to replenish their stock of provisions—a duty which Bruno, much sharper than Nizib, performed to a marvel.

Some hours later they changed horses at Aleschki, and descended towards the isthmus of Pérékop, which unites the Crimea to Russia.

Ahmet had not neglected to send a letter to Selim from Aleschki, and when the travellers were again seated in the

chaise, Kéraban inquired whether his nephew had sent his regards also to his friend the banker.

"I did not forget to do so, uncle," replied Ahmet, "and I added that we were using all diligence to reach Scutari as soon as possible."

"You did well, nephew; and he must not neglect to give us news of himself on every possible occasion."

"Unfortunately, as we never know beforehand where we may stop," said Ahmet, "our letters must remain unanswered."

"True," said Van Mitten.

"By-the-bye," said Kéraban, addressing his friend, "it seems to me that you do not correspond much with Madame Van Mitten. What will that excellent woman think of you?"

"Madame Van Mitten, do you mean?" asked the Dutchman.

"Certainly."

"Madame Van Mitten is undoubtedly an excellent woman. As a wife, I have not a word to say against her; but as a life companion—but why speak of Madame Van Mitten at all, Kéraban?"

"Eh? Well, because I remember her as a most agreeable woman."

"Indeed!" said Van Mitten, in the tone of a man who hears something for the first time.

"Did not I speak of her in the highest terms, Ahmet, when I returned from Holland?" said Kéraban, turning to his nephew.

"Yes, indeed, uncle," replied the young man.

"And during my journey was I not particularly charmed with the reception she gave me?"

"Ah!" remarked Van Mitten.

"Nevertheless," continued Kéraban, "I must allow that at times she is capricious, and has curious ideas on some points. Still, those qualities are inherent in women, and if they cannot get over them, it is best to have nothing to do with them—which is precisely how I have acted."

"And you have acted wisely," said Van Mitten.

"Is your wife as fond of tulips as ever?" inquired Kéraban. "She is a true Hollander in that respect."

"Yes, passionately fond of *them*," replied Van Mitten.

"Look here, Van Mitten. Frankly now, I think you are very cool about your wife."

"Cool! The expression is even too warm, if applied to my regard in that quarter."

"What do you say?" exclaimed Kéraban.

"I say," replied the Dutchman, "that I did not wish you to talk of Madame Van Mitten at all! But since you have mentioned her, and the occasion is favourable, I will make a confession."

"A confession!"

"Yes, friend Kéraban; Madame Van Mitten and I are separated."

"Separated?—by mutual consent?"

"Yes."

"For ever?"

"For ever."

"Tell me all about it, unless your feelings—"

"Feelings!" exclaimed the Dutchman; "why should I have any feeling in the matter?"

"Very well, then. Go on; speak. In my position as a Turk, Van Mitten, I am fond of tales; and, as an unmarried man, I delight in all matrimonial histories."

"Well," said Van Mitten, in a disinterested manner, as if he were telling a story concerning a stranger, "for many years Madame Van Mitten and I did not get on very well. We had disputes upon every subject—bed-time, getting-up time, dinner-time; concerning what we should eat, and what we should not eat; on what we should drink; upon what we did; on the time of day it was, and what it ought to be; on the placing of the furniture; whether the fire should be lighted in this or that room; whether the window or door should be shut or open; on what plants should be retained in the garden, and what should be torn up."

"That promised well," remarked Kéraban.

"Yes, but you see it all came to nothing, as I am of a mild and long-suffering disposition, and I always yielded without causing an open rupture."

"That was perhaps the wisest plan," said Ahmet.

"On the contrary," remarked Kéraban, "it was foolish."

"I don't know anything about it," continued Van Mitten ; "but, at any rate, in our last altercation I wished to resist, and I did resist, like a regular Kéraban !"

"By Allah, that is impossible !" cried the individual referred to, who knew himself thoroughly.

"More strongly than any Kéraban," added Van Mitten.

"Mahomet protect me !" replied the other. "Do you mean to assert that you can be more obstinate than I ?"

"It seems improbable on the face of it," said Ahmet, in a tone that went to his uncle's heart.

"You will soon see," replied Van Mitten quietly.

"We shall not see that !" cried Kéraban.

"Will you permit me to finish ? It was concerning tulips that the discussion arose between me and my wife, about those beautiful tulips—so dear to amateurs—*Genners*, which grow straight on the stalk, and of which there are more than a hundred varieties. I had none which cost me less than a thousand florins a bulb."

"Eight thousand piastres," said Kéraban, who was accustomed to reckon in Turkish money.

"Yes, about that," replied the Dutchman. "Now Madame Van Mitten took it into her head one day to root up a *Valentia*, in order to put an *Œil de Soleil* in its place. This was too much. I objected. She insisted. I endeavoured to seize her ; she escaped, and, rushing upon the *Valentias*, tore one up by the roots."

"Cost ! Eight thousand piastres," muttered Kéraban.

"Then," continued Van Mitten, "I precipitated myself on an *Œil de Soleil*, and broke it."

"Cost ! Sixteen thousand piastres," said Kéraban.

"My wife destroyed a second *Valentia*."

"Twenty-four thousand piastres," replied Kéraban, as if he were calling over his books at his counting-house.

"I responded with another *Œil de Soleil*."

"Thirty-two thousand piastres."

"Then the battle became general," said Van Mitten, "till madame's ammunition was exhausted. I received two splendid 'cloves' on my head."



It was a regular rain of bulbs.

"Forty-eight thousand piastres!"

"She received three others full in the chest."

"Sixty thousand piastres!"

"It was a regular rain of bulbs—such a thing has never been seen—and it lasted half an hour. The whole garden was torn up, and the conservatory afterwards dismantled. My entire collection was destroyed."

"And, finally, the cost was—how much?" asked Kéraban.

"Greater than if we had only wanted head-wounds, like Homer's economical heroes," replied Van Mitten. "One way and another I fancy the cost was about twenty-five thousand florins."

"Two hundred thousand piastres," said Kéraban.

"But I was firm," said Van Mitten.

"That was worth something."

"Besides, I came away, having given orders to have my property realized, and transmitted to the bank in Constantinople. Then I came to Rotterdam with my faithful Bruno, and made up my mind not to enter my house again until Madame Van Mitten had quitted it—for a better world."

"Where tulip-throwing is unknown," remarked Ahmet.

"Now, Kéraban," said Van Mitten, "have you had many fits of obstinacy which have cost you two hundred thousand piastres?"

"I?" said Kéraban, secretly a little annoyed at this question.

"Yes, certainly," said Ahmet, "my uncle has had some—I know at least one."

"What was that, if you please?" asked Van Mitten.

"Why, this obstinate fit, which, for the sake of ten paras, is sending us all round the Black Sea. This will cost more than your little eradication of tulips."

"It will cost what it will cost," replied Kéraban dryly.

"But I think my friend Van Mitten has not paid too dearly for his liberty. That's what comes of having only one wife. Mahomet knew what he was about when he permitted his followers to have as many as they could support."

"Certainly," replied Van Mitten. "I think ten wives are much easier to govern than one."

“What is still more easy,” added Kéraban, moralizing, “is to have no wife at all !”

With this observation the conversation ended.

The chaise continued its course: at the post-house relays were found, and the journey was resumed. After travelling all night, the tourists were somewhat fatigued; but, at the instigation of Ahmet, they decided not to lose an hour, and pressed on. Having passed Bolschoi-Kopani and Kalantschak, they reached Pérékop, at the end of the gulf of the same name—the point where the Crimea unites with Russia proper.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHOWING HOW OUR TRAVELLERS CROSSED THE ANCIENT TAURIDA, AND WITH WHAT TEAM THEY QUITTED IT.

THE Crimea! the Taurisian Chersonese of the ancients; a quadrilateral, or rather an irregular lozenge, which seems to have been lifted by enchantment from the Italian shores; a peninsula which M. de Lesseps would transform into an island with two strokes of his knife; a corner of the earth which has been the coveted possession, and the objective, of all the jealous peoples who dispute for the empire of the East; an ancient kingdom of the Bosphorus, which the Heracleans subdued six hundred years before the Christian era; which yielded to Mithridates, the Alains, the Goths, the Huns, the Hungarians, the Tartars, the Genoese; a province which Mahomet II. made a rich dependency of his empire, and which Catherine II. annexed definitively to Russia in 1791!

How is it possible that this country, blessed by the gods, and disputed for by mortals, should escape the network of mythological legend? Have not wiseacres sought in the marshes of Sivach the traces of the gigantic works of the problematic people of Atlantis? Have not the poets of antiquity placed one of the entrances to the infernal regions near Cape Kerberian, the three "moles" of which form the heads of Cerberus? Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, become a priestess of Diana "in Tauris," was here on the point of sacrificing to the goddess her brother Orestes, cast upon the shores of Cape Parthenium.

And now the Crimea in its southern part—worth more than all the arid islands of the archipelago—with its Tchadir Dag rising four thousand feet to a table-land, whereon a feast could be laid for all the deities of

Olympus ; with its amphitheatres of guests, whose green mantle falls to the seashore ; its "bouquets" of chestnut-trees, cypress, olives, Judas-trees, almonds, and laburnum, and its waterfalls,—is it not the most beautiful jewel in the crown of provinces which extends from the Black Sea to the Arctic Ocean ? Is it not that vivifying and temperate climate that the Russians of the north as well as of the south unite in seeking ; the former to gain a refuge from the severities of a hyperborean winter, the latter to find shelter from the dryness of the east winds ? Have they not founded colonies, and built castles, houses, villas, and cottages around Cape Aïa, whose ram-like head defies the attacks of the Black Sea's waves, even to the extreme south of Tauris ? Here we find Yalta and Aloupka, which belong to Prince Woronsow—a feudal manor outwardly, a dream of an oriental imagination within ; Kisil Tasch, belonging to Count Poniatowski ; Arteck, to Prince André Galitzin ; Marsanda, Orcanda, Eriklik, imperial properties, and Livadia, a splendid palace with its cascades and streams, and whose winter gardens are the favourite retreat of the Empress of all the Russias.

Here all dispositions—the curious, the sentimental, the artistic, the romantic—will find something to satisfy them. This little corner of the earth is a microcosm wherein Europe and Asia mingle. Here we find Tartar villages, Greek towns, oriental cities, with mosques, minarets, muezzins, dervishes, monasteries of Russian foundation, seraglios, thebaïdes in which many romantic adventures are buried ; holy places, to which pilgrims converge ; a Jewish mountain, which belongs to the tribe of Karaites ; and a valley of Jehoshaphat filled with tombs, like an antechamber to its prototype by the Cedron, where thousands of the justified will unite once again at the summons of the last trump.

• What wonderful places Van Mitten had to see !—what novel impressions would he not have to note in this country, to which a strange destiny had led him ! But his friend Kéraban did not travel for the purpose of seeing anything ; and Ahmet, besides being familiar with the Crimea, would not allow an hour more than what was ab-

solutely necessary to be spent in even a cursory examination.

"Perhaps, after all," said Van Mitten to himself, "perhaps I may be able, in passing, to obtain a light impression of this antique Chersonese which has been so justly praised."

But it was not to be. The chaise continued its course by the shortest way, following an oblique line, from north to south-west, without passing through the centre or touching the southern shore of the ancient Tauris. Indeed, such a route as Van Mitten would have followed had been vetoed at a consultation wherein he had no voice. If, by passing through the Crimea, they could shorten the tour of the Sea of Azof—which route would have lengthened the journey one hundred and fifty leagues at the least—they would gain by cutting direct from Pérékop to the peninsula of Kertsch. Then, from the other side of the Strait of Jenikale, the peninsula of Taman would offer a regular passage to the Caucasian territories.

So the chaise continued its way along the narrow isthmus to which the Crimea hangs like a great orange to a bough. On one side is the bay of Pérékop, on the other the marshes of Sivach, better known under the name of the Putrid Sea—a vast tarn fed by the waters of the Tauris and the Sea of Azof, to which the cutting of Ghénitché serves as a canal.

The travellers, as they passed, were able to observe the Sivach, which is scarcely three feet deep, and in which the degree of saltness is almost at "saturation point" in certain places. Now as it is in such spots that the salt crystals are deposited, naturally the "Putrid Sea" could be made the most productive salt-marsh in the world. It must be confessed that the odours of the Sivach are not pleasant. The air is impregnated with sulphuretted hydrogen. The fish that penetrate into the lake are quickly killed. The Putrid Sea resembles in this respect the Lake Asphaltites in Palestine.

The railway from Alexandroff to Sebastopol traverses this marsh. So Seigneur Kéraban heard with horror the whistling of the locomotives, and the rumbling of the trains

upon the rails which are sometimes washed by the dense waters of the Putrid Sea.

Next day, on the 31st of August, the travellers found themselves journeying upon a road through a fertile country. The leaves of the olive-trees, blown back by the wind, seemed to be sprinkled with quicksilver; dark green cypresses, magnificent oaks and arbutus of great height were numerous. Everywhere upon the slopes were vineyards, which produce wines little inferior to some good French vintages.

Thanks to the liberality of Ahmet, no delays were met with: the horses were always at hand to be harnessed, and the postillions, frequently rewarded, were always willing to take the shortest cuts. In the evening they had passed the long straggling village of Dorte, and some leagues farther on they would reach the borders of the Putrid Sea again. At this place the curious lagoon is only separated from the Sea of Azof by a tongue of sand, the average breadth of which is about a quarter of a league. This tongue of sand is called the Arrow of Arabat, and extends from the village of that name to Ghénitché northwards, on *terra firma*, divided only by a cutting of three hundred feet, through which the water from the Sea of Azof enters the marsh, as already stated.

At daybreak Seigneur Kéraban and his companions were surrounded by clouds of damp vapour, thick miasmas, which gradually dispersed under the influence of the sun's rays.

The country was less wooded and more deserted here. A few dromedaries were noticed—animals of great size—and their appearance gave somewhat of an Arabic touch to the landscape. The few carriages that passed were of wood, without a particle of iron, and creaked and groaned loudly. Their appearance was primitive in the extreme; but in the villages, and in the more isolated farms, Tartar generosity and hospitality are continually the prevailing features. Any one may enter, seat himself at table, eat and drink as much as he pleases, and pay his score with a simple "Thank you."

It need scarcely be said that our travellers never abused

these simple customs, which are rapidly disappearing. They left always some sufficient remuneration as a memento of their journey. That evening the team, fatigued by such a long stage, stopped at the *bourgade* of Arabat, at the southern extremity of the "Arrow." There a fortress has been erected, and is surrounded by houses scattered in all directions. All about this part of the country are quantities of fennel, the hiding-places of adders; and whole fields of water-melons, the crop of which is very abundant.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when the chaise was stopped before an *auberge* of small pretensions. It was the best in the place. In the forsaken Chersonese it does not pay to be too particular, and our travellers had to put up with the inn.

"Nephew Ahmet," said Kéraban, "we have travelled for many days and nights without any more delay than was necessary to change horses. Now, for my own part, I shall not be sorry to have a few hours' sleep, even in a hotel bed!"

"I shall be delighted to do the same," said Van Mitten, rubbing his hips to get rid of his stiffness.

"What! lose twelve hours?" exclaimed Ahmet. "Twelve hours in a journey of six weeks?"

"Do you wish to argue the point?" asked Kéraban, in the slightly aggressive tone he usually adopted.

"No, uncle—no," said Ahmet. "When you have need of repose—"

"Well, I have need of repose now; so has Van Mitten and Bruno, I suppose, as well as Nizib, who is only too glad to get it."

"Seigneur Kéraban," said Bruno, "I regard this idea of yours as one of the best you have ever had, and all the more praiseworthy if supper be included and served first."

This suggestion of Bruno was very much to the point, as the provisions which had been carried in the chaise were rapidly diminishing, and what remained it would be necessary to leave untouched until the travellers reached Kertsch, an important town in the peninsula of the same name, where they could obtain an abundant supply.

Unfortunately, if the beds of the Arabat Inn were pretty good, even for travellers of such distinction, the arrangements of the kitchen left much to be desired. Tourists are not numerous in the Taurida: the principal guests at the *auberge* of Arabat are merchants or salt-buyers, people not difficult to please, who sleep on the hard beds, and eat whatever is put before them.

Seigneur Kéraban and his companions had to put up with a meagre repast—that is to say, a dish of *pilaw*, the national food, but with more rice than fowl, and more bone than flesh. Besides, the fowl was so old and tough that it nearly resisted and defied Kéraban himself; but the solid molars of the headstrong Turk gained the victory at last, and he did not yield any more than he had ever done.

After this dish a veritable tureen of *yaourts*, or curdled milk, came upon the board to assist in the digestion of the *pilaw*: then some cakes, of a not very appetizing character, called *katlamas*.

Bruno and Nizib were scarcely as well supplied as their masters, as might be expected. Their jaws would, no doubt, have done justice to the toughest of fowls, but they had not the opportunity to exercise them in that way. The *pilaw* on their table was substituted by a black substance, something like a thin brick from the chimney-back.

"What is that?" asked Bruno.

"I don't know what they call it," replied Nizib.

"What! you a native of the country, and—"

"I am not a native of the country."

"Well, very nearly—you are a Turk," replied Bruno. "Well, my friend, taste a piece of this dried boot-sole, and tell me what you think of it."

Nizib, always willing, took a piece of the said leather sole, and bit it.

"Well?" asked Bruno.

"Well, it is not good, but it is possible to eat it, all the same."

"Yes, Nizib, when one is dying of hunger, and one has no other choice of food."

Then Bruno boldly attacked the dish, like a man who has

decided not to get thin, but to risk all in the attempt to keep up appearances. And this the men did, aided by several glasses of a certain alcoholized beer.

Suddenly Nizib cried, "Allah protect me!"

"What has happened?" inquired Bruno.

"Suppose what I have eaten prove to be pork?"

"Pork!" exclaimed Bruno. "Ah! just so, Nizib. A good Mussulman, like you, is not permitted to partake of that excellent but unclean animal. Well, it seems to me that if the thing we have eaten is pork, we have only one course open to us—"

"That is—?"

"To digest it as quietly as possible, now we have eaten it."

But Nizib was not so easily comforted, for he was a very strict observer of the law of the Prophet, and he felt greatly troubled in mind. So Bruno volunteered to ascertain from the landlord what he had sent up for dinner.

Nizib was quickly reassured, and his digestion was no longer troubled. The dish was not meat at all; it was fish, *shebac*, a kind of "Saint Peter's" fish, which, when caught, is split and dried in the sun, and then smoked. These fish are exported in considerable numbers from Rostow on the Sea of Azof.

Masters and servants had accordingly to be content with a very light supper at the Inn of Arabat. The beds appeared even more unpleasant than the gnats in the carriage; but the sleepers were not subjected to any violent jolting, and the rest they obtained in their not too comfortable rooms was sufficient to recruit their energies.

Next morning, on the 2nd of September, at daybreak, Ahmet was afoot, and he set off to the post-house in search of relays. The team which had brought our travellers to the inn was quite exhausted, and unable to continue the journey without a further rest. Ahmet had made up his mind to bring the chaise, all ready horsed, to the inn door, so as to leave his uncle and Van Mitten no excuse—they had only to enter the chaise and depart for Kertsch.

The post-house was some distance off, at the end of the

village; and the roof, ornamented with crosses of wood, gave it the appearance of the finger-board of a "double bass." But of horses there was no sign whatever! The stable was empty, and the post-master could not supply the animals for any consideration.

Ahmet, very much annoyed at this check, returned to the inn. Kéraban, Van Mitten, Nizib, and Bruno, all ready to start, were waiting for the chaise. Already one of the party—it is needless to say which—was exhibiting signs of impatience.

"Well, Ahmet," cried this individual, "have you returned alone? I thought you had gone to procure horses for us?"

"My errand was useless, uncle," replied Ahmet. "There is not a single horse to be had."

"No horses!" exclaimed Kéraban.

"And we cannot have any before to-morrow," added Ahmet.

"To-morrow!"

"Yes. That means a loss of twenty-four hours."

"Twenty-four hours!" cried Kéraban; "but I do not mean to lose ten, not five, not even one."

"Nevertheless," said the Dutchman, "if there are no horses—"

"There shall be some," replied Kéraban, walking away, and signing to the others to accompany him. In a quarter of an hour they reached the post-house. The post-master was standing on the steps in the easy attitude of a man who knew that one is not obliged to provide what he does not possess.

"You have no more horses, I hear?" said Kéraban, in a far from conciliatory tone.

"I have only those that you brought here yesterday, and they are unfit to travel," replied the post-master.

"And why, if you please, have you no fresh horses in your stables?"

"Because they have been taken by a Turkish seigneur who has gone to Kertsch, *en route* to Poti and the Caucasus."

"A Turk!" exclaimed Kéraban. "One of your Euro-

pean Ottomans, no doubt. They are not content with interfering with us in the streets of Constantinople, but they must inconvenience us in the Crimea!"

"Who is this man, this Turk?" he continued, after a pause.

"His name is Seigneur Saffar; that's all I know about him," replied the post-master quietly.

"Why did you permit Seigneur Saffar to take all the horses?" asked Kéraban with contempt.

"Because the traveller arrived here twelve hours before you, and as the horses were available I had no reason for refusing them to him."

"You ought to have done so—"

"Ought to have done so?" echoed the post-master.

"Yes, certainly, when I was on the road hither," replied Kéraban.

Now what could one reply to such arguments? Van Mitten endeavoured to interpose, but was only snapped up by his friend. As for the post-master, he only gazed at Kéraban with a contemptuous expression, and turned away to enter the house. But Kéraban stopped him by saying, "After all, it does not matter whether you have horses or not; we must proceed at once."

"Proceed at once! Have I not told you I have no horses?" replied the post-master.

"We'll find some."

"There are none in Arabat."

"Find a pair—~~find~~ one," replied Kéraban, who began to lose his self-control; "find half a one, but find something."

"But if there are no horses—" began Van Mitten gently.

"There must be some found."

"Perhaps you can procure for us a team of mules?" said Ahmet to the post-master.

"Very well, mules will do," said Kéraban. "We will be content with mules."

"I have never seen any mules in the province," replied the post-master.

"He has seen one to-day," whispered Bruno to Van Mitten, as he indicated Kéraban; "and a fine one too."

"Are there any asses?" inquired Ahmet.

"No more asses than mules."

"No asses!" exclaimed Kéraban, "You are playing with us, monsieur. No asses in this country—not enough to form a team—not sufficient to relay a carriage? You are joking."

As he spoke Kéraban looked round at a number of natives who had assembled near the post-house.

"He is quite capable of having those people harnessed to the chaise," muttered Bruno.

"Yes, them or us," replied Nizib, who knew his master.

However, since there were neither horses, mules, nor asses, it was evident that the travellers could not proceed; and all they could do was to resign themselves to the delay of twenty-four hours. Ahmet, who was as greatly put out as his uncle, was about to try to make him hear reason in the absolute impossibility of procuring horses, when Kéraban cried out,—

"A hundred roubles to any one who will find me a team."

A shiver passed over the natives who heard this offer. At length one man boldly came forward, and said,—

"Seigneur Turk, I have two dromedaries to sell."

"I will buy them," said Kéraban.

To harness a pair of dromedaries to a carriage was an experiment never hitherto made, but it was going to be attempted now.

In less than an hour the bargain was completed, and at a high rate. But no matter. Seigneur Kéraban would have paid double the amount. The two animals were harnessed, and with the assurance of a substantial "tip" the late proprietor of the dromedaries, mounting as postillion, seated himself on the hump of one of the animals. Then the chaise, to the great astonishment of the natives, and to the extreme satisfaction of the travellers, descended the road toward Kertsch at a long slinging trot. The same evening the travellers reached Argin, twelve leagues from Arabat.

There were no horses there either, in consequence of the Seigneur Saffar having had them. Our travellers were obliged to sleep at Argin and give the dromedaries a rest.

Next day, on the 3rd of September, the chaise departed

under the same conditions and reached Marienthal, seventeen leagues from Argin. The night was passed there, and at daybreak the travellers started again, and after a run of twelve leagues reached Kertsch without accident, but not without some rude jolting, consequent upon the "pulling" of the dromedaries, which were quite new to the business.

To sum up, Seigneur Kéraban and his companions, who had started on the 17th of August, had, after nineteen days' journeying, accomplished three-sevenths of the required distance—three hundred leagues out of seven hundred. They had, therefore, done well; and if they continued to progress in like manner during the twenty-six days still remaining—till the 30th of September—they would complete the tour of the Black Sea within the prescribed period.

"Somehow," said Bruno to his master again, "somehow I can't help thinking that the journey will end badly."

"For my friend Kéraban, do you mean?"

"For your friend Kéraban, or for those who accompany him," replied Bruno.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH KERABAN PROVES THAT HE IS STRONGER IN GEOGRAPHY THAN HIS NEPHEW AHMET BELIEVED.

THE town of Kertsch is situated in the peninsula of that name at the eastern extremity of the Taurida. A hill on which formerly the Acropolis was situated dominates the town. This is Mount Mithridates, so called from the implacable enemy of the Romans, who failed to drive them from Asia. The polyglot ancient, audacious general and legendary poisoner has justly his place in the front of a city which was the capital of the kingdom of the Bosphorus. There that King of Pontus, that terrible Eupator, fell on the sword of a Gallic soldier, after having vainly tried to poison his iron frame which he had accustomed to poison.

This little historical summary Van Mitten gave his companions during a short halt. But the relation only called from Kéraban the remark,—

“Mithridates was a stupid blunderer.”

“How so?” asked Van Mitten.

“If he had really desired to poison himself, all he had to do was to dine at that inn at Arabat.”

After such a commentary as this Van Mitten could not proceed with his eulogy of Mithridates, but he made up his mind to visit the monarch's capital in the few hours left to him.

The chaise passed through the town and created considerable surprise amongst the inhabitants, in consequence of the pair of dromedaries. Ahmet's first care on arrival at the Hotel Constantine was to inquire whether horses could be had on the following morning, and to his great satisfaction ascertained that there was no lack of steeds in the stables of the post-house.

“It is fortunate,” he said to his uncle, “that Seigneur Saffar has not taken all the relays.”

But the little-enduring uncle did not the less cherish a grudge against the man who had dared to travel before him, and take his horses. However, as he had no further need for his dromedaries, he sold them to the conductor of a caravan, but only obtained for them living the same price as he would have gotten for the carcasses. This loss Kéran carried in his mind's ledger to the account of Seigneur Saffar.

We may assume that Saffar was not in Kertsch, else a little dispute would probably have arisen, which might have had serious consequences. He had quitted the town two days previously, by the Caucasus route. This was fortunate, as our travellers were about to travel by the lower road.

A good supper at the Hôtel Constantine, a good night in comfortable quarters, made both the masters and servants forget past troubles. So a letter written by Ahmet to his *fiancée* at Odessa was the bearer of good news and a report of the journey as regularly accomplished.

As the hour of departure had been fixed for ten o'clock next morning, Van Mitten was enabled to explore the town. Rising with the sun, he found Ahmet on this occasion ready to accompany him. So they walked through the wide streets of Kertsch, which have paved footways and are swarming with multitudes of vagabond dogs. These animals are looked after by a man specially appointed to knock them on the head, but that time he must have been asleep, for Ahmet and the Dutchman had considerable difficulty to escape from the dangerous brutes.

The stone quay, built into the sea at the curve of the bay, afforded them a more secure promenade. Upon the quay are the governor's palace and the custom-house. At some distance out the vessels are anchored, for there is not much water in the bay, though the anchorage is good. The port has become very commercial since the cession of the town to the Russians in 1774, and there is a large salt depot there, the mineral being furnished from the mines of Pérékop.

"Have we time to ascend that hill?" asked Van Mitten, indicating Mount Mithridates, on which a Greek temple

stands, enriched with the spoils of the tumuli which are so numerous in the province. This temple has replaced the ancient Acropolis.

"Hum," said Ahmet, "I would not like to run the risk of keeping Uncle Kéraban waiting."

"Nor his nephew," said Van Mitten, smiling.

"Quite true," replied Ahmet. "All the journey I have scarcely thought of anything but our return to Scutari. You understand, I am sure, M. Van Mitten?"

"Yes, I understand, my young friend," replied the Dutchman; "nevertheless, the husband of Madame Van Mitten might be excused if he did not comprehend you."

With this profound reflection, justified by the condition of things in Rotterdam, the friends, finding that they had two hours to spare, commenced the ascent of Mount Mithridates.

From the summit an extensive view is to be had over the bay of Kertsch. In the south the extreme end of the promontory is visible. Towards the east the two tongues of land which enclose the bay of Taman are evident, beyond the strait of Yenikale. The clear atmosphere permitted all the features of the country to be seen, and even the *khourghans* or ancient tombs with which the province is studded were visible, even to the smallest.

When Ahmet thought that time was up, he led Van Mitten down into the market-place again by a monumental staircase ornamented with balustrades. A quarter of an hour later they rejoined Kéraban, who was endeavouring to discuss some point with his host—a placid Tartar. It was quite time that his friends arrived, for Kéraban was getting angry because there was nothing to put him out of temper. The chaise was quite ready. The horses, of Persian breed, were already harnessed; and when our travellers had taken their seats, they departed at a gallop, which was a pleasant relief from the fatiguing trot of the dromedaries.

Ahmet could not overcome a certain anxiety which oppressed him when approaching the strait. He was aware that it would have to be passed when the route had been changed at Kherson. At his nephew's request Kéraban had consented not to go round the Sea of Azof, and thus

make a short cut across the Crimea. But it never occurred to Kéraban that there was not *terra firma* all the way. He was mistaken, and Ahmet did not undeceive him.

One may be a good Turk, an excellent tobacco-merchant, and yet an indifferent geographer. Kéraban was probably unaware that the flow of the Sea of Azof into the Black Sea is carried through a wide "sound," the ancient Cimmerian Bosphorus, known as the Strait of Yenikale, and must be crossed by any one who wishes to pass between the peninsulas of Kertsch and Taman.

Now Seigneur Kéraban had for the sea a repugnance which his nephew was fully aware of. What would he say then when he found himself by the strait, and if, in consequence of currents or want of water, it became necessary to cross it at its widest part—a distance of nearly twenty miles? Suppose he refused to venture? Suppose he insisted on remounting the whole eastern side of the Crimea to gain the littoral of the Sea of Azof, up to the spurs of the Caucasus? What a prolongation of the journey this would be—what lost time—what interests would be compromised! How could they then hope to reach Scutari by the appointed time?

These were the thoughts that perplexed Ahmet as the chaise rolled on. In less than two hours the shore would be reached, and the uncle would have to decide. How was he to prepare himself for the event? He must take care that no discussion arose. If the hot-headed Kéraban once took a side, nothing would turn him from his idea, and he would insist on turning round and retracing his way to Kertsch.

Ahmet was at a loss. If he confessed his little *ruse*, he might put his uncle in a passion. It would be better, he thought, to pass himself off as ignorant of the geographical features of the province, and to feign the greatest surprise when he discovered a strait where he quite expected dry land.

"Allah aid me!" muttered Ahmet, and then he waited, with all a Turk's fatalism, the result.

The peninsula of Kertsch is divided by a long trench

made in ancient times, which is called the rampart of Akos. The road which in part follows it is good enough as far as the Lazaretto; then it becomes difficult and slippery in descending towards the coast.

The horses could not proceed very fast during the morning, so Van Mitten had an opportunity to look over this portion of the Chersonese at leisure. He perceived a Russian steppe in all its bareness. Some caravans were crossing the plain, or seeking shade under the rampart of Akos in camp, with all the picturesque surroundings of an Oriental halt. Innumerable *khourghans* covered the country, and gave the plain the appearance of an immense cemetery. These, or similar tombs, had furnished antiquaries with the jewels, Etruscan vases, cenotaph stones, and other relics which now bedeck the walls of the temple and the halls of the museum at Kertsch.

Towards midday the travellers came in sight of a great square tower, flanked by four turrets: this is the fort which is situated to the north of the village of Yenikale. To the south, at the extremity of the Bay of Kertsch, is Cape Aubouroum, dominating the shore of the Black Sea. Then the strait opens with its two points, which enclose the Bay of Taman. In the distance the nearest profiles of the Caucasian range are visible.

The strait certainly resembles an arm of the sea at the point where Van Mitten, aware of his friend's antipathy, gazed at Ahmet in consternation.

Ahmet made him a sign to hold his tongue. Fortunately his uncle was just then dozing, and saw nothing of the Black Sea or the Sea of Azof, which confronted him in the sound, whose narrowest part measures five or six miles across.

"Diable!" muttered Van Mitten.

It was certainly annoying that Seigneur Kéranban did not live a hundred years later. Had his journey been made at that time, Ahmet would not have felt so uneasy.¹ For the sand in that strait has a growing tendency to silt up, and this cause will limit the passage to a swiftly running stream

¹ Nor would this tale have been written,—*Translator*.

in time. If, a hundred and fifty years ago, the ships of Peter the Great were enabled to besiege Azof, at the present time vessels are forced to wait until the south wind heaps up the waves and gives them ten or twelve feet of water under their keels.

But our travellers were there in 1882, not in the year 2000, A.D., and were obliged to accept hydrographical conditions as they then existed.

Meanwhile the chaise descended the slopes, which trend down to Yenikale, disturbing, as it rolled on, flocks of bustards from the high grass. The travellers stopped at the principal hotel, and then Seigneur Kéraban awoke.

"Is this the relay station? Are we having them put to?" he inquired.

"Yes; relays of Yenikale," replied Ahmet simply.

All the travellers alighted while the carriage went on to the posting-house. Thence it would be conveyed to the quay, where the ferry-barge was lying for the conveyance of travellers on foot, or on horseback, or in carriages, and even for the transport of whole caravans, which pass and repass between Europe and Asia.

Yenikale is the headquarters of a lucrative commerce in salt, caviar, tallow, and wool. The sturgeon and turbot fisheries occupy a large proportion of the population, which is almost entirely Greek. The sailors engaged in the coasting-trade pursue their avocation in small, latcen-sail boats. Yenikale occupies an important strategical position: that is why the Russians fortified it after seizing it in 1771. It is one of the ports of the Black Sea, which hereabouts has two keys of safety: the key of Yenikale on one side, and Taman on the other.

After a halt of an hour Seigneur Kéraban gave his companions the signal to proceed, and they walked towards the quay, where the ferry-barge was waiting for them.

Suddenly Kéraban glanced right and left, and uttered an exclamation.

"What is the matter, uncle?" asked Ahmet, who was not quite at his ease.

"There is a river yonder," said Kéraban, indicating the strait.

"Yes, indeed ; so there is," replied Ahmet, who thought it best to leave his uncle under that impression.

"A river !" began Bruno.

But a sign from his master gave him to understand that the point need not be insisted on.

"No," said Nizib. "It is a—"

He was not permitted to finish his sentence, for a violent blow from his comrade Bruno cut short his explanation, just as he was developing his hydrographical attainments.

Meanwhile Seigneur Kéraban was steadfastly regarding the "river" that barred his way. "It is wide," he said.

"Well, yes—pretty wide—in consequence of a flood most likely," replied Ahmet.

"Floods, you know, owing to the melting of the snow," added Van Mitten, with the laudable intention to back up his young friend.

"Melting of the snow—in September ?" said Kéraban, turning upon Van Mitten.

"Certainly ; the melting of the snow. The old snow of course, the Caucasian snow," replied Van Mitten, who had not the least idea of what he was saying.

"But I do not see the bridge by which we can cross this river," continued Kéraban.

"The fact is," said Ahmet, "there is no longer a bridge." As he spoke he closed his hands and looked through them, as through a field-glass, the better to examine the mythical bridge over the pretended river.

"They ought to have a bridge here," said Van Mitten. "My 'guide' mentions the existence of a bridge."

"Ah ! your guide mentions the bridge, does it ?" said Kéraban, frowning as he gazed at the Dutchman.

"Yes, the famous bridge," stammered Van Mitten, "the—the Pontus Euxinus, you know—Pontus Axenos—of the ancients."

"So very ancient," replied Kéraban, and the words came hissing through his set teeth, "so very ancient that it could not resist the flood caused by the melting of the ancient snows."

"From the Caucasus," added Van Mitten, who had come to the end of his imaginative topography.

Ahmet stood a little apart all this time. He did not know what reply to make to his uncle, and did not wish to provoke any discussion on the topic.

"Well, nephew," said Kéraban drily, "how are we to pass this 'river,' since the bridge has been carried away?"

"We shall find a ford, no doubt, said Ahmet. "There is so little water—"

"Scarcely enough to wet our feet," added Van Mitten, who had better have held his tongue.

"Well, then, my friend, turn up your trousers and wade across this river. We will follow you," said Kéraban.

"But—I—"

"Come, come; tuck them up."

The faithful Bruno here thought it time to interfere to bring his master out of the dilemma.

"It is no use, Seigneur Kéraban. We can pass without wetting our feet. There is a ferry close by."

"Ah! there is a ferry-boat, is there? It is very fortunate that we can go in a barge which has no doubt been kindly substituted for the bridge, the famous Pontus Axenos. Why didn't you say so before? Where is this barge—this raft?"

"Here, uncle," replied Ahmet, indicating the flat-bottomed boat which was made fast to the quay. "Our carriage is already on board."

"Indeed, our carriage is already on board?"

"Yes, and with the horses already harnessed."

"Harnessed? Who gave that order?"

"Nobody, uncle. The post-master has done it as usual."

"Since the bridge has broken down, I suppose?"

"Besides, uncle, there is no other way of continuing our journey," said Ahmet, ignoring the bridge.

"There is another way, nephew Ahmet. We can return and skirt the northern shore of the Sea of Azof."

"Two hundred leagues further, uncle. And my wedding. The date is the thirtieth. Have you forgotten the thirtieth?"

"By no means, nephew; and before that date I shall have surely returned. Let us go."

Ahmet experienced a pang for a moment. Would his uncle put his mad project in execution and return; or would

he take his place in the ferry, and cross the Strait of Yenikale.

Seigneur Kéraban directed his steps towards the boat. Van Mitten and the rest followed him, not wishing to afford him any pretext for the discussion which was threatening.

Kéraban paused for fully a minute upon the quay, looking round him. His companions also stopped.

Kéraban entered the ferry-barge. So did his friends.

Kéraban mounted into the chaise. The others did likewise. Then the boat was cast off, and the current impelled it towards the opposite side.

Kéraban never spoke. His friends were equally silent.

Fortunately the water was calm and the boatmen had no trouble to guide the ferry-boat with their long "gaffs" or poles according to the exigencies of the transit. Nevertheless there was a moment when an accident seemed imminent.

A gentle current, turned by the southern point of the Bay of Taman, had caught the boat obliquely, and instead of landing at that point, it seemed as if the boat would be carried out into the bay, and have to traverse five leagues instead of one. In that case probably Kéraban would have given orders to return.

But the boatmen, to whom Ahmet had said some encouraging words in which the term "rouble" was of frequent occurrence, manœuvred the ferry-boat well, and escaped the current. Thus in an hour after quitting the quay of Yenikale, travellers, horses, carriage, all were landed at the extreme point of the southern side of the bay which is by the Russians called Ioujnaïa-Kossa. There was no difficulty in disembarking, and the men were liberally remunerated.

In former times the strip of land had formed two islands and a peninsula; that is to say, it was cut in two places by a channel, and it would have been impossible to cross it in a carriage. But the channels are now filled up. So the chaise had no difficulty in passing over the four versts which separate the point from the village of Taman.

An hour after disembarkation the travellers entered Taman, and Seigneur Kéraban, looking hard at his nephew, merely said,—

“Decidedly, the waters of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azof agree wonderfully well in the Strait of Yenikale!”

That was all; and never after was there any mention of the “river” discovered by Ahmet, or of the celebrated “*Pontus Axenos*” of Van Mitten.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH KÉRABAN, AHMET, VAN MITTEN, AND THEIR SERVANTS PLAY THE PART OF SALAMANDERS.

TAMAN is but a melancholy-looking town, with its comfortless houses, its thatched roofs discoloured by the weather, and its wooden church, the bell-tower of which is continually concealed by the flocks of falcons which wheel around it.

The chaise merely passed through Taman. So Van Mitten was not able to visit the military positions, nor the fortress of Phanagoria, nor the ruins of Tmoutarakan.

If Kertsch is Greek in population and costume, Taman itself is Cossack, a contrast which the Dutchman could not help remarking upon.

The chaise, invariably proceeding by the shortest routes, followed for an hour the southern shore of the bay of Taman. The travellers saw enough to perceive that the country was full of game, and afforded opportunities for shooting almost unequalled in any other part of the globe.

In fact, pelicans, cormorants, grebes, without counting the flocks of bustards, arose from the marshes in incredible numbers.

"I have never seen such quantities, of water-fowl," observed Van Mitten. "One might fire into the marsh at random: not a grain of shot would fail to hit."

This remark evoked no discussion. Kéraban was no sportsman, and Ahmet was occupied with far different thoughts. There was not even the commencement of a dispute, except when a flock of wild ducks rose, alarmed at the approach of the carriage, just as it was quitting the coast-road to turn to the south-east.

"There is a flock!" exclaimed Van Mitten; "it is really a regiment!"

"A regiment! you mean an army," replied Kéraban, shrugging his shoulders.

"*Ma foi*, you are right," said Van Mitten. "There are at least a hundred thousand ducks."

"A hundred thousand!" exclaimed Kéraban. "If you had said two hundred thousand now!"

"Oh, two hundred thousand!"

"I should even say three hundred thousand, Van Mitten, and then I should be in no way exaggerating."

"You are right, Seigneur Kéraban," replied the Dutchman, prudently, for he did not wish to excite his companion to throw a million wild ducks at his head. But he was right: a hundred thousand ducks is an immense flight, but there were certainly no fewer in that extensive cloud of birds which threw such an immense shadow on the waters of the bay. The weather was very fine, and the road was fairly passable for carriages. The horses proceeded rapidly, and there were no delays at the relays. They no longer had Seigneur Saffar in front of them.

We need hardly say that when night came on they passed it still rapidly on the journey towards the first slopes of the Caucasus, which appeared in the distant horizon. Since the night had been passed at the hotel at Kertsch, no one had even thought of quitting the chaise for six-and-thirty hours.

However, towards evening, at supper-time, the travellers stopped at one of the post-houses, which was also an inn. They did not know what the resources of the Caucasus were, and whether food was easily procurable there. So they thought it prudent to economize the provisions taken in at Kertsch.

The inn was of second-class quality, but there was an abundance of food. So they had nothing to complain of on that score. Only the hotel-keeper, perhaps out of his natural distrust, or according to the custom of the country, wished them to pay for everything as soon as they had had it. So when he brought the bread he said,—

"This is ten *kopecks*."

Ahmet gave him the money.

Then he came in with some eggs.

"These are eighty *kopecks*," he said. And Ahmet paid the eighty *kopecks* demanded.

For the *kwass* for the wild ducks so much : for the salt—yes, even for the salt—so much. Ahmet paid all, even to the knives, glasses, spoons, forks, and plates.

As may be expected, such dealings served only to excite Kéraban so much that he finished by purchasing *en bloc* the various necessities for the supper, but not without certain objurgations which the landlord listened to with an impassibility which would have done credit to Van Mitten. When the meal was finished, Kéraban resold the utensils at a loss of fifty per cent.

"It is lucky that he does not charge us anything for our digestion," remarked Kéraban. "What a man he is! He ought to be Financial Minister in Turkey. That is a man who would know how to tax every oar that ever rowed a caique across the Bosphorus."

But they had supped well enough, which was an important matter, as Bruno remarked ; and they proceeded on their way when night had fallen—a dark, moonless night.

It is quite a curious experience, but one not without charm, to find oneself hurried along in a carriage in profound darkness, through an unknown country, in which villages are far apart and even farmhouses are scattered. The jingling of the harness bells, the measured fall of the horses' hoofs, the sound of the carriage wheels upon the sandy plain, the jolting in the ruts, the cracking of the postillion's whip, the gleam of the lamps which is soon lost in the darkness when the road is open, and which is vividly flashed back by trees, rocks, drinking sign-boards erected on the embankment of the road ; all these constitute an *ensemble* of sights and sounds to which few travellers can remain insensible. They hear the noises ; they see the objects in a dreamy manner, in a kind of half-somnolence, which lends to the surroundings a somewhat fantastic character.

Seigneur Kéraban and his companions were not insensible to this impression, which increased every instant. Through the windows of the carriage they contemplated, with half-closed eyes, the great shadows of the equipage—capricious, undefined, moving shadows, which developed themselves in front upon the vaguely lighted road.

It was about eleven o'clock when a peculiar sound awoke the travellers from their reverie. The noise was a kind of whistle, something like that which is produced by opening a bottle of mineral water, but increased tenfold. One might have imagined it was caused by steam blowing off from the safety-valve of a boiler.

The carriage stopped. The postillion could hardly hold his horses. Ahmet, anxious to know what the matter was, hastily let down the window of the chaise.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "Why do not you go on? What is that noise?"

"It is caused by the mud volcanoes," replied the postillion.

"Mud volcanoes!" cried Kéraban. "Who ever heard of 'mud volcanoes!' This is certainly a pleasant way you are taking us, nephew Ahmet!"

"Seigneur Kéraban, you and your companions had better descend," said the postillion.

"Descend!" exclaimed Kéraban.

"Yes. I must trouble you to follow the chaise on foot, as I cannot manage the horses, and they may run away."

"Let us do so," said Ahmet. "The man is right. We must get out."

"There are five or six versts to be traversed," added the postillion: "perhaps eight, but no more."

"Will you decide, uncle?" said Ahmet.

"Let us get out, Kéraban," said Van Mitten. "We must see what kind of phenomena these mud volcanoes are."

Kéraban consented, but not without protest. They all quitted the carriage and walked behind the chaise, which only advanced at a slow pace, guided by the light of the lamps. The night was very dark. If the Dutchman had any expectation of seeing the mud volcanoes, he was disappointed; but, unless one were deaf, it would have been impossible to avoid hearing the curious hissing sound they emitted.

Had it been daylight they would have seen an immense steppe, upon which had been puffed up on all sides little eruptive cones, like the large ant-hills one meets with in

Central Africa. From these cones escaped gaseous and bituminous springs, which are called mud volcanoes, though volcanic action has nothing to do with their production. The eruption is simply a mixture of mud, gypsum, chalk, pyrites, with petroleum even, which, under the pressure of carbonated, or sometimes phosphorated, hydrogen gas, escapes with considerable violence. These little heaps, which are raised by degrees, give way to permit the eruptive matter to escape, and afterwards fall in, when the tertiary formations are exhausted, in a space of time of greater or less duration.

The hydrogen gas produced under these conditions is due to the slow, but continuous decomposition of petroleum mixed with various other substances. The rocky region in which it is enclosed is finally broken up under the action of water (rain or springs), the filtration of which is continuous. Then the effusion ceases, just as the effervescence of champagne will cease as the elasticity of the gas is exhausted. These cones of ejected matter open in great numbers in the peninsula of Taman. There are other localities in the peninsula of Kertsch, for instance, where they may be observed; but our travellers did not see them, for they do not exist near the high road.

However, the travellers passed here between the great mounds surrounded with fumes, in the midst of the outpourings of liquid mud. Sometimes the pedestrians were obliged to approach so close to them that they received puffs of the gas right in their faces, which gave them a most disagreeable sensation, and was of a most unpleasant odour.

"Eh," said Van Mitten, who recognized the presence of gas, "we are in danger here. I trust there will be no explosion."

"You are right," replied Ahmet. "We must be cautious, and ought to extinguish the lamps."

The postillion, who was doubtless conversant with the route, was evidently of the same opinion, for the lamps were suddenly extinguished.

"Mind you do not smoke, you fellows," cried Ahmet to the servants.

"You may be quite easy on that point, Seigneur Ahmet," replied Bruno; "we have no desire to be blown up."

"What!" exclaimed Kéraban; do you mean that we cannot smoke here?"

"No, uncle," replied Ahmet; "we must not smoke for some versts at least."

"Not even a cigarette?" added the "headstrong one," who was rolling a pinch of *tombéki* in his practised fingers.

"Later on, friend Kéraban, later on; it is for all our sakes," said Van Mitten. "It would be as dangerous to smoke here as in a powder magazine."

"A nice country this!" muttered Kéraban. "I should be surprised if a tobacco merchant made his fortune here. Nephew Ahmet, though we had lost a few days, it would have been better to have gone round the Sea of Azof."

Ahmet made no answer. He did not wish to enter into a discussion on this subject. His uncle grumblingly put the cigarette in his pocket, and the travellers continued to follow the chaise, which was a shapeless mass looming in the obscurity of the night.

It was necessary, then, to proceed with extreme caution for fear of falling. The road was much cut up, and by no means firm under foot. The way ascended gradually towards the east. Fortunately there was no wind, so the vapours ascended straight into the air, instead of blowing against the travellers and thus greatly incommoding them.

They advanced very cautiously for about half an hour. The horses "whinnied" and plunged continually, so that the postillion had considerable difficulty to restrain them. The axle-trees of the chaise groaned when the wheels slipped into some deep rut or other; but the carriage was pretty strong, as had been already proved in the marshes of the lower Danube. In another quarter of an hour the region of the mudcones would be passed.

Suddenly a vivid light appeared on the left of the road. One of the cones had taken fire, and was burning with a tremendous flame. The steppe was illuminated to the extent of a verst around it.

"They are smoking there," muttered Ahmet, who was in advance of his companions. But no one was smoking.

Suddenly the postillion was heard calling out in front. Then the loud cracking of his whip succeeded. He could not manage the horses, which darted forward, and the chaise was dragged away at a tremendous pace.

The pedestrians halted in consternation. The whole plain presented a most terrifying aspect. In fact the flames had been communicated by one cone to another, and they exploded successively with great violence, like immense displays of fireworks.

Now the immense illumination quite filled the plain. In the weird light appeared hundreds of great cones vomiting fire, the gas from which burned in the midst of liquid ejected matter; some cones flared with the sinister gleams of petroleum, others were coloured diversely by the presence of sulphur, pyrites, or carbonate of iron.

All the time deep growling sounds were audible, and the travellers were afraid lest the earth should open, and form an immense crater under the pressure of so much eruptive matter.

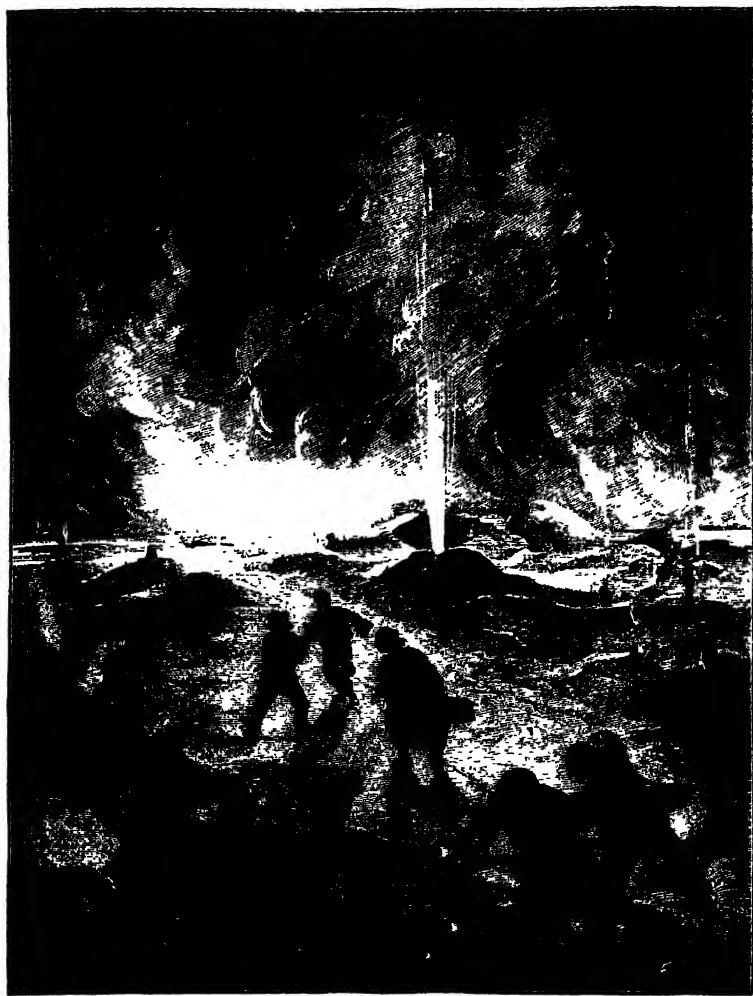
There was indeed imminent danger. Instinctively Kéraban and his companions separated, so as to diminish the danger of a common destruction. But they did not stop—they passed on more rapidly: it was absolutely necessary to traverse the dangerous zone as quickly as possible. The way, well lighted, appeared practicable. So, winding in and out amongst the cones, they traversed the fiery steppe.

"Come on—come on," cried Ahmet.

The others did not answer him, but they complied. Each one hurried in the direction which the chaise had taken, but they could not perceive it. On the horizon night reigned darkly, and there it was evident the zone of fire terminated.

Suddenly a tremendous explosion burst out in the road itself. A jet of flame rose from a great heap, which erupted the ground in an instant.

Kéraban was knocked down, and his companions could perceive him struggling through the flame. What would become of him if they did not go to his assistance?



The immense illumination quite filled the plain.

With one bound Ahmet dashed to the assistance of his uncle. He seized him before the burning gas could reach him, and dragged him, half suffocated, beyond the influence of the vapours.

"Oh! uncle, uncle!" cried the young man.

Then Van Mitten, Bruno, and Nizib, having assisted to carry him to the thicket near by, endeavoured to reanimate Kéraban.

At length, after some vigorous coughing, Kéraban began to breathe freely. When he was restored to his senses and to life, his first words were,—

"Do you dare to dispute, Ahmet, that it would not have been better to have made the tour of the Sea of Azof?"

"You are right, uncle," he replied.

"As I always am, nephew, always!"

Kéraban had scarcely finished this little speech, when profound darkness fell upon the plain. The cones had become simultaneously and suddenly extinguished, as if the hand of a machinist had cut off the gas. Everything was pitchy dark, and appeared all the more sombre after the late glow, which had left its impression upon the retina of the light which had so suddenly been extinguished.

What had happened then? How had the cones caught fire, since no light had approached them?

We can offer a probable explanation. To the influence of a gas which will take fire when it comes in contact with the air, such a phenomenon, like that which took place in the vicinity of Taman in 1840, was due. This gas is phosphoretted hydrogen, generated in phosphates. It is visible in the carcasses of dead animals, and in marshy places. It takes fire, and communicates the flame to the carbonetted hydrogen, which is only the ordinary gas we use for lighting purposes. So, under the influence, perhaps, of certain atmospheric conditions, the spontaneous combustion was suddenly produced in a way which could not have been foreseen.

From this point of view, the peninsulas of Kertsch and Taman present serious dangers, from which it is difficult to guard, as they are so very sudden.

Seigneur Kéraban was not far wrong when he said that

any other route would have been preferable to that they were pursuing. But, after all, they had escaped the danger; uncle and nephew a little singed, no doubt, but the others without even a burn.

Three versts further on they found the carriage and horses, with the postillion, who had mastered his cattle. The moment the flames had gone out, he had lighted the carriage lamps again; and, guided by their gleam, the travellers rejoined him without danger, and without fatigue.

Each one resumed his place. They started again, and the night passed without incident. But Van Mitten preserved a vivid recollection of the scene. He could not have been more astonished if the chances of life had carried him to that part of New Zealand where the springs boil up in the eruptive hills.

Next day, the 6th of September, eighteen leagues from Taman, the chaise, having turned the Bay of Kisiltasch, traversed the village of Anapa, and at about eight o'clock in the evening stopped in Rajewskaja, on the borders of the Caucasian district.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH THE RELATIVE MERITS OF THE TOBACCOS
OF PERSIA AND ASIA MINOR ARE DISCUSSED.

The Caucasus is that part of Southern Russia composed of high mountains and extensive plains, of which the orographic system tends somewhat from west to east for a distance of three hundred and fifty kilomètres. To the north extends the country of the Don Cossacks: the government of Stavropol, with the Steppes of the Kalmouk and Nogais tribes. In the south are the principalities of Tiflis, capital of Georgia, of Koutais, Bakou, Elisabethpol, Erivan, besides the provinces of Mingrelia, Imeritia, Abkasia, and Gouriel. To the west of the Caucasus is the Black Sea, to the east the Caspian.

The whole country to the south of the principal chain of the Caucasus is named Transcaucasia, and has no other frontiers than those of Turkey and Persia: at the point of contact is Mount Ararat, on which the Ark of Noah rested.

There are numerous tribes which inhabit or traverse this important region. These belong to the Kazteval, Armenian, Tscherkess, Tochetschine and Lesghian races. In the north are the Kalmouks, Nogais, Mongolian Tartars; in the south are the Tartars of Turkish descent; Kurds and Cossacks.

If *savants* are to be credited, it is from this semi-European, semi-Asiatic district that the white race emanated—the whites who now inhabit Asia and Europe. So they are by them called the “Caucasian Race.”

Three main Russian roads traverse this enormous barrier, which comprises such mountains as Chat-Elbrouz, 4000 mètres; Kazbec, 4500 mètres; and Elbrouz, 5600 mètres high.

The first of these routes, of both strategical and commer-

cial importance, runs from Taman to Poti, along the littoral of the Black Sea. The second, from Mosdok to Tiflis, passes by the Col du Darial; the third, from Kizliar to Bakou, by Derbend.

We need scarcely say that Kéraban, in accord with his nephew Ahmet, took the first. What was the use of entangling themselves in the wilds of the Caucasus; so courting difficulty and delay? A road was open as far as Poti, and there are plenty of towns and villages on the littoral of the Black Sea.

There are railways, which it would have been possible to utilize, but Ahmet knew the strong objection his uncle entertained to this mode of locomotion, and avoided the subject which his uncle had tabooed in the case of the Taurus and the Chersonese Railways.

All that was quite understood, and the indestructible chaise, having undergone a few necessary repairs, took the road again, and quitted Rajewskaja early on the morning of the 7th September.

Ahmet was determined to proceed with the utmost possible speed. Twenty days remained in which the journey must be finished, so as to reach Scutari upon the appointed date. On this point Kéraban agreed with him. No doubt Van Mitten would have preferred to travel more at his ease—to receive and record more lasting impressions, and not to be tied to time—but Van Mitten was not consulted. As a guest only had he agreed to accompany and dine with Kéraban at Scutari. Well, was he not taking him to Scutari? What more did he wish for?

Nevertheless, Bruno felt it incumbent upon him to make a few observations as they were entering the Russian Caucasus. The Dutchman, having listened, asked his servant to conclude.

"Well," continued Bruno, "why not let Seigneur Kéraban and Ahmet proceed without rest along the Black Sea?"

"To leave them—do you mean?" inquired Van Mitten.

"Yes, leave them, after bidding them *bon voyage!*"

"And remain here?"

"Yes: so then we may see the Caucasus at our ease, since our unlucky star has led us hither. After all, we shall

be as well off as in Constantinople within reach of Madame van—”

“Hold your tongue, Bruno; do not pronounce that name!”

“I will not if it is disagreeable to you, sir; but it is to her, in fact, that we owe this expedition. To run the risk of being engulfed in marshes, to be roasted in volcanic districts—is too much, it is indeed. I would therefore suggest, not a dispute with Seigneur Kéraban—you would come off second-best there—but just let him understand by a few gentle words that you will see him in Constantinople, when it pleases you to return thither!”

“That would not be quite practicable,” replied Van Mitten.

“It would be prudent,” replied Bruno.

“You find a good deal to complain of, then?”

“Yes, a great deal; and besides—I do not know whether you have remarked it—I am getting thin.”

“Not much, Bruno, not much.”

“Ay; but I know very well that I am; and if I go on like this I shall soon become a skeleton!”

“Have you been weighed, Bruno?”

“I wanted to get weighed at Kertsch,” replied Bruno, “but there was only a letter-weight obtainable.”

“And would not that suffice?” said Van Mitten, laughing.

“No, sir,” replied Bruno gravely, “but before long it will suffice to weigh your poor servant. Now, shall we let Seigneur Kéraban continue his journey without us?”

Certainly this manner of travelling did not suit Van Mitten, who was of a phlegmatic temperament, and disliked hurry. But the idea of abandoning his friend Kéraban was so repugnant to him that he refused to entertain it.

“No, Bruno,” he said, “I am his invited guest—”

“A guest!” exclaimed Bruno, “a guest who has to travel seven hundred leagues instead of one league!”

“No matter,” replied his master.

“Permit me to tell you that you are wrong, sir,” continued Bruno; “I repeat it for the tenth time. We are by no means at the end of our troubles, and I have a presentiment that you will have your full share of them.”

Would Bruno's presentiments be realized? The future will reveal that. In any case he had done his duty as a devoted servant in warning his master; and, since Van Mitten resolved to continue the journey—a journey as ridiculous as fatiguing—the valet had no choice but to follow him.

The road continued almost invariably along the shores of the Black Sea, following the contour of the land. If it sometimes branched away a little to avoid some obstacle of the shore, or to reach some village, it was never more than a few versts. The last spurs of the Caucasus, which run parallel to the coast, die away on the boundaries of this little-used route. On the horizon eastward can be perceived the rugged teeth-like, snow-tipped summits, which seem to bite into the sky. At one o'clock in the afternoon the travellers turned the little Bay of Zèmes, seven leagues from Rajewskaja, so as to reach, about eight leagues farther on, the village of Gelendschik. These townships are some distance from one another, you see.

Upon the littoral of the Black Sea we may reckon one little town at this average distance; but beyond these small groups of houses—frequently only a village or hamlet—the country is almost deserted, and is beginning to be even less frequented by the coasting vessels.

This band of *terra firma* between the mountains and the sea is well wooded; trees of various kinds are plentiful, and are united by the wild vines which twine about their limbs as in a tropical forest. In every direction nightingales and warblers sing in the fields of azalées, which nature has planted in this fertile country.

Towards midday the travellers fell in with a tribe of Kalmucks, nomads, who dwell in *oulousses*, comprising many *khotounes*. The latter are regular "ambulant villages," composed of a certain number of *kibitkas* or tents which are pitched at random—sometimes on the steppes; sometimes in the verdant valley; sometimes by the side of a water-course—according to the fancy of the leaders. The Kalmucks are of Mongolian extraction, and were formerly very numerous in the Caucasus; but the exigencies of the Russian administration, not to say its "vexations," have compelled a retreat towards Asia.

The Kalmucks have carefully preserved their ancient manners and special costume. Van Mitten was able to note that the men wore large trousers, boots of Morocco leather, a *khalate* (a kind of very ample wadded dressing-gown), and a square cap, trimmed with sheepskin. The women were dressed very much in the same manner, with the exception of the girdle, and a cap, from which their hair, trimmed with parti-coloured ribbons, escaped. The children were almost naked; and, during the winter, to warm themselves, they crouch in the ashes in the *kibitka*, and sleep amid the hot cinders of the hearth.

The Kalmucks are small of stature, but robust; excellent horsemen, quick, agile, and smart. Their food is a little flour mixed with water, and cooked with horse-flesh. But they are confirmed drunkards, skilful thieves, ignorant, superstitious to excess, incorrigible gamblers, like all the nomads of the Caucasian steppes.

The post-chaise passed through one of the *khotounes* without attracting any particular attention. The people scarcely took the trouble to look at the travellers, one of whom, at least, observed them with great interest. Perhaps they coveted the rapid horses of the vehicle; but, fortunately for Kéraban, they confined themselves to the wish. So the horses reached the next stage, without having exchanged their loose box for the picket of the Kalmuck encampment.

The chaise, having skirted the Bay of Zemes, found the road closed in between the spurs of the mountains and the sea. But, beyond the bay, the route widened out, and became more easy.

At eight o'clock the *bourgade* of Gelendschik was gained. There the travellers supped hastily, and at nine o'clock continued their journey. They proceeded all night, and at seven o'clock in the morning reached Beregowaja; at midday they gained Dschuba; at six p.m., Tenginsh; at midnight, Nebugsk; next morning, at eight o'clock, Golowinsk; at eleven, Lachowsk; and, two hours later, Ducha.

Ahmet would have been puzzled to complain of all this. The journey had been accomplished without accident;

but without incident, which did not altogether please Van Mitten. His tablets boasted only a record of geographical names. He had not seen anything particularly novel, and had not had any new impression worth recording.

At Ducha the chaise remained for two hours, while the postmaster sent to fetch the horses, which were at pasture.

"Well," said Kéraban, "let us dine as comfortably, and for as long a time, as circumstances will permit!"

"Yes, let us dine," assented Van Mitten.

"And dine well, if possible," murmured Bruno, regarding his dwindling rotundity of figure.

"Perhaps this halt will provide us with something of interest, which, hitherto, our journey has lacked. I think my young friend Ahmet will permit no breathing time—"

"Until the arrival of horses," said Ahmet. "This is already the ninth of the month."

"That is the kind of answer I like," said Kéraban. "Let us go and see what we can have."

The inn was but an indifferent one; built on the bank of the little river Mdsymta, which rushes down from the neighbouring hills in a torrent.

The little town of Ducha resembles the Cossack villages which are known as "*stanisti*," with palisades and gates that are dominated by a square tower, wherein a watch is kept day and night. The houses have high thatched roofs, wooden walls, plastered over with clay, and shaded by fine trees. The people are well-to-do. The Cossacks, however, have almost completely lost their individuality in the Russians. But they remain as brave and active as ever. They are excellent guardians of the boundaries committed to their charge, and are justly esteemed the best equestrians in the world, as well in the hunting down of the chronically rebellious mountaineers, as in the jousts and tourneys in which they prove themselves accomplished cavaliers.

The natives are a fine race, remarkable for the beauty and elegance of their forms, but not of their costume, which partakes of the nature of the dress of the Caucasian mountain tribes. Nevertheless, under the high-furred cap, it is still easy to recognize those energetic faces which a thick beard conceals as high as the cheek-bones.

When Kéraban, Ahmet, and Van Mitten seated themselves at table, a repast was served, the elements of which had been taken from a neighbouring *doukhan*—a kind of shop in which the characters, pork-butcher, the victualler, and the grocer are all preserved in the same individual. There was a roast turkey, maize cakes, buffalo cheese, called "*gatschapouri*"—the inevitable national dish—*blini*, a kind of pancake made with sour milk. For beverages they had some batches of thick beer, and flasks of *vodka*, a strong brandy, of which the Russians consume a great quantity.

Frankly, one could not expect to dine better at the little inn of a village, situated on the extreme limits of the Black Sea; and assisted by excellent appetites, the travellers did full justice to the repast, which was a welcome change from their usual provisions on the journey.

After dinner, Ahmet left the table while Bruno and Nizib took their shares of the remains of the feast. The young man as usual went to the post-house to hurry the relays, and quite prepared to disburse tenfold the five *kopecks* per verst per horse, which the regulations permit, as well as liberal "tips" to the postillions.

Meanwhile, Kéraban and his friend Van Mitten made themselves very comfortable in a kind of summer-house which overhung the river. Now or never was the time to abandon themselves to the luxurious *dolce far niente*, which the Ottomans call "Kief."

Besides, the preparation of the *narghilés* became necessary to supplement such a meal. So the pipes were brought from the chaise to the smokers, who yielded themselves to the pleasures of the weed to which they owed their fortune.

The "bowls" of the *narghilés* were quickly filled with tobacco, but it is needless to remark that Kéraban used his own *tombéki* of Persian growth, while Van Mitten smoked the Latakia of Asia Minor.

Then the pipes were lighted: the smokers reclined on the benches, and inhaled the smoke through the long flexible tubes. The atmosphere was soon filled with the odour of the smoke, which was not permitted to reach the mouth until it had been cooled by the clear water of the *narghilé*.

For some time the friends smoked in silent enjoyment with half-closed eyes, and apparently supported by the clouds of smoke which appeared like an "aerial eider-down."

"Ah, this is real enjoyment," said Kéraban at length. "I know of no better way of passing an hour than this chat with one's pipe."

"Conversation without discussion," remarked Van Mitten.

"The Turkish Government has been as usual very badly advised to impose a tax on tobacco ten times its value," said Kéraban. "Thanks to that besotted folly, the use of the *narghilé* is gradually disappearing."

"That is much to be regretted, Kéraban," said Van Mitten.

"For my own part," continued his friend, "I have such a predilection for tobacco, that I would rather die than give up the use of it. Yes, die! Had I lived in the time of Amurat IV., the despot who wished to prohibit it on pain of death, I would have let them cut my head off with my pipe in my mouth."

"I quite agree with you," said the Dutchman, emitting two or three puffs of smoke.

"Gently, gently, do not smoke so fast," cried Kéraban. "You have no time to taste the pleasant smoke. You are like a glutton who bolts his food."

"You are always right, friend Kéraban," replied Van Mitten, who would not have provoked a discussion at that time for the world.

"Always right, Van Mitten."

"But what surprises me," continued the Dutchman, "is that we tobacco-merchants experience the greatest pleasure in smoking our own wares."

"And what then?" said Kéraban, who was always ready for an argument.

"Well, because, if it be true that pastrycooks are usually disgusted by pastry, and sweetmeat sellers by sweetmeats, it seems to me that a tobacco-merchant—"

"Permit me an observation—just one remark, Van Mitten."

outside ; and, certainly, they had reached a point where serious consequences might be expected to ensue, when Ahmet came in. Bruno and Nizib, attracted by the uproar, followed him. All three remained standing on the threshold.

"Look here," exclaimed Ahmet, laughing loudly. "My uncle is smoking M. Van Mitten's pipe, and M. Van Mitten is smoking uncle Kéraban's !"

Nizib and Bruno confirmed the assertion in chorus.

In fact, when they picked up their pipes, the disputants had each seized the wrong one ; and so, without perceiving the exchange, the disputants had respectively asserted the virtues of their favourite tobacco ; Kéraban all the while smoking Latakia, and Van Mitten, tombéki.

They could not help laughing, and finally they shook hands like friends whose good feeling no dispute could disturb.

"The horses are harnessed," said Ahmet ; "we have only to get into the chaise."

"Let us go, then," said Kéraban.

Van Mitten and he then handed the *narghilés* to their valets, and the whole party were soon seated in their travelling carriage. But, as he got in, Kéraban could not help saying in a low tone to his friend,—

"Now that you have tasted it, will you not confess that tombéki is far superior to Latakia ?"

"I willingly confess as much," said the Dutchman, who did not wish to get into another discussion.

"Thank you, my friend," replied Kéraban, who was much moved by this concession, "that is an avowal which I will never forget."

Then the pair cemented, by a vigorous grasp of the hand, the truce which had lately been proclaimed between them, and which ought not to be broken. The chaise was urged rapidly along the coast road, and at eight o'clock in the evening the frontier of Abkasia was reached. The travellers halted here for relays, and slept soundly until the next morning.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEREIN IS RELATED A VERY CURIOUS ADVENTURE,
WHICH TERMINATES THE FIRST PART OF THIS
HISTORY.

ABKASIA is a province by itself in the midst of the Caucasian region, in which only a military jurisdiction prevails. It is bounded on the south by the River Ingour, whose waters form the boundary of Mingrelia, one of the principal divisions of the government of Koutaïs.

It is a beautiful province, one of the richest in the Caucasus, but the prevailing system is not one to display its wealth to the best advantage. The inhabitants have scarcely yet begun to be proprietors of the soil, which belongs almost entirely to the reigning princes, descended from a Persian dynasty. So the native is still in a semi-savage condition, possessing little idea of time, without any written language, and speaking a kind of *patois* which his next neighbours can scarcely understand; and such a poor *patois*, too, that it lacks words to express the most elementary idea.

Van Mitten was not slow to remark the great difference which existed between this country and the districts through which he had already passed. On the left of the road were fields of maize, very few of corn; goats and sheep, well tended; oxen, horses, cows wandered at liberty in the meadows; there were fine trees, white poplars, fig-trees, nut-trees, oaks, limes, plane-trees, extensive thickets of box and holly: such is the appearance of Abkasia. As an intrepid traveller—Madame Serena—has remarked, “If one compares the three provinces of Mingrelia, Samourzakan, and Abkasia, one may say that their civilization respectively is in the ratio of the culture of the hills which surround them. Mingrelia, which socially is the foremost, has wooded and cultivated heights; Samourzakan, already behindhand, presents a half-savage aspect; Abkasia, last

remains in almost a primitive condition, and has only a line of uncultivated hills, which are at present untouched by manual labour." Such is Abkasia, which, of all the Caucasian districts, will be the last to enjoy the blessings of individual liberty.

The first halt which the travellers made after crossing the frontier was at the village of Gagri, which is a pretty place, possessing a beautiful church, the sacristy of which is used as a cellar; a fort, which is a military hospital; a torrent, which was then dry, named the Gagrinska: the sea is on one side, on the other a fruitful country, planted with fine acacias, and dotted with rose plantations. In the distance extends the boundary chain between Abkasia and Circassia, whose inhabitants, since their defeat by the Russians in the terrible campaign of 1859, have abandoned the beautiful coast.

The chaise, which reached this place at nine o'clock at night, remained till next day. Seigneur Kéran and his companions slept in one of the *doukhans* of the village, and quitted it early. At midday, six leagues farther on, Pizunda afforded them a change of horses, and Van Mitten had half an hour to admire the church wherein the patriarchs of the Western Caucasus formerly resided. This edifice, with its brick cupolas, formerly covered with copper, the design of its naves, which followed the shape of the Greek cross, the frescoes on the walls, the façade shaded by elms, is raised to a position amongst the most curious monuments of the Byzantine style of the sixth century.

Then the same day our travellers passed the villages of Goudouati and Gounista: at midnight, after a rapid journey of eighteen leagues, they snatched some repose at Soukhoum-Kalé, which is built upon a wide bay which reaches to the south as far as Cape Kodor.

Soukhoum-Kalé is the principal port of Abkasia; but in the last war in Caucasia the town was partly destroyed. In it there was a motley crowd of Greeks, Armenians, Turks, Russians even in greater numbers than natives. Now the military element is predominant, and the steamers from Odessa or Poti carry numerous visitors to the barracks, built near the ancient fortress, which was erected in the

sixteenth century under the rule of Amurah at the time of the Ottoman dominion.

A very Georgian repast, consisting of an acid soup, a kind of chicken broth, a ragout seasoned with acid, saffron-flavoured milk; a repast little appreciated by two Turks and a Dutchman. The party left the town at 9 a.m.

Having passed the pretty little town of Kélasouri, built in the shady valley of Kelassur, the travellers crossed the Kodor twenty-seven versts from Soukhoun-Kalé. The chaise skirted enormous groves of trees which one might compare to virgin forests (with inextricable jungles and thick scrub, penetrable only by water or fire; and in which were swarms of serpents, wolves, bears, and jackals), forming a corner of tropical America planted upon the shore of the Black Sea. But already the axe of the explorer is heard in these forests, which centuries have left untouched; and the beautiful trees will disappear ere long into the framework of houses or ships.

Otchemchiri, the chief place of the district, which includes Kodor and Samourzakan, is an important maritime town situated upon two streams: Ilori, whose Byzantine church is worth seeing, but could not be visited by our travellers, who were pressed for time; Gajida and Anaklifa were all passed during that day's travel, one of the longest and most rapid portions of the journey as regards the time and the pace. But about eleven o'clock in the evening, the travellers reached the frontier of Abkasia, passed the river Ingour, and twenty-five versts farther on stopped at Redout-Kalé, the chief town of Mingrelia, one of the provinces of the government of Koutaïs.

The remainder of the night was passed in sleeping. Tired though he was, Van Mitten rose early with a view to see something before they started again. But he found Ahmet already stirring, though Kéraban was still asleep in the fairly good room which had been assigned him at the principal hotel. "Out of bed already?" said Van Mitten, when he perceived Ahmet. "Is my young friend inclined to join me in a stroll this morning?"

"Have I time for it, M. Van Mitten?" said Ahmet. "Must I not replenish our stores for the journey? We shall soon pass the Russo-Turkish frontier, and it will not

be an easy matter to revictual in the deserts of Lazistan and Anatolia. So, you see, I have not a moment to lose."

"But when you have done that," said the Dutchman, "have we not plenty of time?"

"When I have seen to the provisions," replied Ahmet, "I must look to our carriage and get the wheelwright to examine the screws and grease the axles; I must examine the reins and the drag. It will never do to find any repairs are required after we have passed the frontier. I intend to put the chaise in thorough repair, and I depend upon its lasting to the end of this wonderful journey of ours."

"Quite right. But when you have seen to all that?"

"Then I will examine the relays, and I must go to the postmaster to arrange that."

"Very well; but after that?" said Van Mitten, who would not relinquish his idea.

"After that it will be time to start," replied Ahmet, "and we shall be off. So I must leave you."

"One moment, my young friend," said the Dutchman. "Let me ask you a question."

"Speak, but quickly, please, M. Van Mitten."

"You are doubtless aware of what is worth seeing in this province of Mingrelia."

"Pretty well!"

"It is the country watered by the poetic Phasis, whose waters deposited gold dust upon the marble steps of the palaces built upon its banks."

"Quite so."

"Here is the legendary Colchis, where Jason and his Argonauts, assisted by the magician Medea, obtained the Golden Fleece guarded by a formidable dragon, without mentioning the terrible bulls which vomited flame."

"I do not deny it." •

"Finally now, in those mountains yonder is the rock of Khomli, overlooking Koutais, to which Prometheus was bound, and where the vultures eternally feed upon his entrails, as a punishment for having stolen the bolts of heaven."

"Nothing is more true, M. Van Mitten, but I repeat I am in a hurry. But what are you coming to?"

"To this, my young friend," replied the Dutchman in his most amiable manner: "several days spent here in this part of Mingrelia, and as far as Koutaïs, would be well spent; and—"

"So you propose that we should remain some days in Redout-Kalé?"

"Oh, four or five days would suffice."

"Would you make that suggestion to my uncle Kéraban?" said Ahmet somewhat maliciously.

"I! Never, my young friend," replied the Dutchman. "It would give rise to a discussion, and since that regrettable dispute about the tobacco, I declare I will never enter into an argument with that excellent man again."

"And you will act wisely."

"But at this moment I am not addressing the terrible Kéraban. I am speaking to my young friend Ahmet."

"You are mistaken, M. Van Mitten," said the young man, taking his hand: "you are not speaking to him at this moment."

"To whom then?"

"To the *fiancé* of Amasia; and you know that he has not an hour to lose."

As he finished speaking, Ahmet hurried away to complete his preparations; and Van Mitten, much disappointed, was obliged to content himself with a promenade of a very unsatisfactory nature in the little town, accompanied by his faithful but discouraging Bruno.

At midday all the travellers were ready to start again. The chaise, which had been carefully examined and repaired, promised to last for many long journeys. The provision-lockers had been replenished, so there was nothing to fear on the score of food for many versts, or rather "*agatchs*," since the provinces of Asiatic Turkey were to be traversed during the second portion of the journey: but Ahmet might well congratulate himself on having forestalled every eventuality which might arise either in food or in locomotion.

Seigneur was delighted, as he perceived the journey was being accomplished without accident or incident. How his self-love as an "old Turk" would be flattered when he

arrived upon the left shore of the Bosphorus, notwithstanding the Ottoman authorities and the tax collectors, it is needless to insist.

Redout-Kalé being only ninety versts from the Turkish frontier, in four-and-twenty hours the most headstrong of Turks might depend upon stepping once more upon Ottoman territory. Then he would be at home.

"*En route*, nephew," cried Kéraban good-humouredly. "May Allah continue his protection!"

"*En route!*" said Ahmet.

They took their places, followed by Van Mitten, who in vain endeavoured to find out the mythological peak of the Caucasus on which Prometheus had expiated his crime. The chaise started with much cracking of the whip and neighing of horses.

In an hour the chaise passed the frontier of Gouriel, which since 1801 has been annexed to Mingrelia. Poti is the capital—a considerable port on the Black Sea, whence a railway is laid to Tiflis, the capital of Georgia.

The road ascends gently through and into a fertile country. Here and there are villages or houses scattered amid the fields of maize. The appearance of these structures is curious; they are not built of wood, but of platted straw like basket-work. Van Mitten made a note of this. Indeed there were only these petty details to be noted in the journey across the ancient Colchis. Subsequently, perhaps, he will be more happy when he reaches the banks of the Rion—the river of Poti—the celebrated Phasis of antiquity, which many geographers believe to have been one of the four Rivers of the Garden of Eden.

In another hour the travellers were stopped by the railway which runs from Poti to Tiflis; and which crosses the highway a verst below the Sakario station. They were obliged to cross the line, to reach Poti, by the left bank of the stream. The horses were pulled up at the gate of the level-crossing. The windows of the carriage were down; so Kéraban and his friends could see all that passed. The postillion began to call for the gate-man, who had not put in an appearance.

Kéraban put his head out of his window.

"Are we to lose our time on account of a wretched railway company?" he cried. "Why is the gate closed?"

"No doubt a train is due," said Van Mitten quietly.

"Why is a train due, then?" retorted Kéraban.

The postillion continued to call out, without achieving any result. No one appeared either in the hut or in the garden.

"May Allah choke him!" exclaimed Kéraban. "If he does not come, I will open the gate myself!"

"Calm yourself, uncle," said Ahmet, restraining him, for Kéraban was about to descend from the chaise.

"Calm myself?"

"Yes, here is the gatekeeper."

In fact, the man appeared at that moment and came very leisurely towards the chaise.

"Now then, are we to pass, or not?" exclaimed Kéraban.

"You can pass," replied the man, "the train from Poti will not come up for ten minutes."

"Open your gate, then, and do not delay us needlessly here: we are in a hurry."

"I am going to open it," replied the man.

So saying, he proceeded to open the gate at the opposite side first, and then the gate before which the chaise was waiting; but all deliberately, and with complete indifference to the demands of the travellers.

Kéraban was already boiling over with impatience.

Finally the way was clear, and the chaise began to cross the line.

At this moment, on the opposite side, appeared a party of travellers. A Turkish noble, mounted upon a splendid horse, and attended by four riders as an escort, prepared to cross the line.

This personage was evidently an important individual. He was about thirty-five years old; tall; and comported himself with that peculiar nobility of the Asiatic race. He was good-looking enough; his eyes only sparkled when he was moved by passion. His forehead was bronzed; his beard black, and flowing to his chest; white teeth, and lips which seemed unused to smiling. In fine it was the physiognomy of an imperious man, powerful by position



4
man walked up to the chief cavalier, and put his hand on the horse's
bridle.

